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THE
OLD ROMAN WELL.

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VOL. I.

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THE
OLD ROMAN WELL:

A ROMANCE OF
DARK STREETS AND GREEN LANES.

Novel

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE OLD ROMAN WELL.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHILD DOWN THE WELL.

It was evening in the country. The sun was setting ; the stars, faint and pale, were creeping timidly into light : gnats were humming in a cluster in the air, and a night-hawk was uttering its long hoarse cry.

The day's work was over, and everything was going home. In the farmyard the carters were passing from stable to stable, filling the racks with warm and fragrant hay, and arranging with their pitchforks the sides of the great straw beds upon which the tired horses were already laid.

And the milkmaid was seated on her little wooden stool, squeezing the last drops of milk into her brimming pail.

The sun sank lower and lower : the moon rose

slowly from an ocean of foliage, and lapped the green leaves with its blue dim tremulous rays.

Then arose those mysterious sounds—those whispers from the earth, the water, and the sky, which are heard at night alone, and which lull rather than disturb, like the rocking of the sea-waters, like the fanning of the gentle zephyr's wings, like the murmurings of a heart which reposes faintly fluttering upon one's own.

I lead you to the summit of a bare white hill now darkened by the grim shadows of surrounding trees. Thence might be seen a noble landscape of woods and hills rising upon each other towards the distant hem of the sky, and divided by the river, which was like a long streak of silver.

In the corner of the horizon, where the sun had set, the view was obscured by a golden mist, the train of the departed sovereign of the skies. To the left were the downs, cold, grey, and spectral : to the right the blue dusky hills which seemed to mingle with the lilac and slate-coloured clouds.

In the foreground of this lovely scene there was a cottage—a day-labourer's cottage: its thatch damp and rotten, and gaping with wide holes; its broken window-panes stuffed with rags and morsels of newspaper; and the whole secured by wooden rods nailed across in imitation of sash-work.

A wan ghastly woman stood at the open door

attempting to nurse a child at her withered bosom, and replying to its cries with a sickly smile. Sometimes she turned to rebuke a horde of children who were leaning and struggling against the board before the door, and sometimes she would look towards the road, and bend her head as if to listen.

Suddenly her face brightened like a white tomb beneath the first cold beams of the moon. She had seen two men who were ascending the road which passed close by her cottage. She watched them attentively.

They were English peasants returning home from work. The one a grey-headed old man, who trudged up that steep hill with his head hanging on his breast, and supporting himself with a thick oak cudgel, which sometimes almost slipped from his grasp. He wore a *dudley* or wide-awake, old and weather-beaten as himself, a green smock-frock which descended below his knees, and a pair of knotty wrinkled gaiters and laced boots.

The other was a stripling, dressed much in the same fashion. He was a fine well-made young man, with broad shoulders and a pair of sturdy arms, which swung backwards and forwards as if unable to rest, even after a hard day's work.

They formed a singular contrast: the one bent and weary and weak, gasping and sighing as he walked; the other, his tread firm and erect, his

eyes bright and hopeful, and his breath pouring evenly from his broad and powerful chest. They sat down side by side on a green mound, which was embosomed by furze-bushes.

When the woman saw this she uttered a peevish cry. Why did her Absalom sit out there on the grass without coming in? She always kissed him the first thing when he came home: she was fond of him because he was her first-born, and he was so young and strong and handsome that she was proud of him too. And there he was chattering with old Luke Godwin, that had been at work with him all day.

And she began to fret herself over this as if she had not enough troubles already. But it has often been remarked that those who have always been accustomed to suffering learn to take a strange pleasure in their own misfortunes; and, as some animals feed only upon sour plants, they delight in banishing from their minds any stray gleam of hope or happiness which has broken in upon their wonted gloom.

‘Ay, Absalom!’ said the old man, as they gazed upon the scene which I have just described. ‘It’s a beautiful world as long as you keep to the outside. The trees be beautiful, and the clouds be beautiful; but come to go into men’s houses and to look into men’s hearts, and ye find it’s all black and poisoned there.’

Absalom glanced towards his own home, and saw his mother looking anxiously towards him. Then a strange cloud crossed the young man's face, and he smiled bitterly.

'One hasn't to live long,' he said, 'afore he finds out that he's born to a hard lot. It's work, work, work, to put money into the rich people's pockets, and to put oneself into the grave afore one's time. There's none live such hard lives as our'n.'

'Don't 'ee be too fast, don't 'ee be too fast,' said Luke, shaking his head. 'The rich mayn't be so well off as we think for all they ride in fine carriages, and dine off fine plates. They hasn't anything to do, recollect, and dall'd if I don't think as doing nothing's the hardest work under the sun. I tried it onst, however, and I was gallus glad to have a touch at pebble-bostin' (stone-breaking) agen. That wor when I wer young and lissom, mind ye ; I doant know as I should mind trying my hand on that sort o' work *now*, ye know : it might come easier-like ; he ! he ! he !'

'If I could ha' a good meal every day,' said Absalom, with the tone of a hungry man, 'shouldn't shiver at a day's work ; but ploughing other folk's corn on your own empty stomach do pull one back nationally.'

'Ay !' chuckled the other. 'Stomachs do crave

rarely when they're growin'. I could ha' ate on for ever pretty nigh when I wor your age. But don't 'ee grumble, boy, don't 'ee grumble. There's many a man born worse nor you be. There's them as works in mines, so they say, as don't see the sun for years ; and there's poor creatures in the big town as has to work twice as long as we, and all without a mouthful of fresh air and not many mouthfuls of food.'

'Who talks of men's work and men's troubles ? who talks of them as grub in mines, or them as starves in cities ?'

At the sound of that sharp querulous voice they turned hastily round. It was Mrs. Absalom, who, impatient at her son's delay, had approached them, and had heard the last sentences of their conversation.

'Ye talk of work ! Look at them that has to work out in the fields like the men, and they were never made for that surely. Poor wenches ! and some of 'em with childern too, and them to look after, let alone the house-cleanin'. Why it's doin' two days' work in one. And them as goes to sarvice is no better off. Always a-foot from morning to night, and expected to do everything and to be everywhere for a few pounds a year.'

'Yes,' said Godwin, 'they has an unkid time of it, has the wimen.'

'Ah ! Luke, and it's not work alone. A woman

has cares and pains which the heart of man can never know. When a man sins he is called a fool and he's laughed at, and it all passes over in a week ; but the woman who has listened to that man's lies, and who has believed his sweet promises, and who has gone to his treacherous arms, is hissed at and spitted at, and shunned by all. She must sorrow and starve and bear their harsh words all her life. And sometimes worse things happen, Luke,—ay ! even in such spots as these, far far from towns where they say the bad men dwell. Sometimes there's murder done, Luke. Sometimes the mother hates that for which most mothers would freely die, and kills it, harky'ee ! kills it out of her way.'

These words were pronounced in a hoarse whisper, and her eyes glared fitfully round. They both rose shuddering.

'That's what it is ye men do : ye coax women to sin, and then ye drive them to sorrow ; and then ye drive them to shame ; and then ye drive them to crime, to prison, and to death.'

There was a sad pause for a few moments ; then Luke said to Absalom,

'It's drawing on late and I must be goin' home—leastways what we call home. God help us ! and a cold home it is.'

'Which way d'ye go then—through the shaw ?'

'Ay ! through the shaw by the old well.'

‘By what old well?’

‘By the old well in the shaw agen your cottage.’

‘Who—oy you don’t meant to say—’

‘I means to say as there’s a well close agen your own cottage door. You’re one of the near-sighted sort, I suppose, and can’t find eyes for things as is under your nose.’

‘It aint far off sartinly,’ said Mrs. Absalom. ‘It was only yesterday arternoon that Ann Whittick was here with her chance-born child in her arms, and she said that she’d be afraid of living where I did for fear of the children getting down the well.’

‘I should like to see that ’ere well,’ said Absalom, meditatively.

‘It’s an old Roman well, so the squire says, and of course *he* knows,’ said Luke. ‘And it is but a spit and a stride into the shaw.’

‘Ye aint a goin’ to see that well now,’ said his mother. ‘Ye’re always away somewhere; ye won’t let your poor mother see you for a moment if you can help it: you comes in late and says you’re tired and goes to bed: never has a word nor a look to fling to any one, much less a smile or a kiss.’

Absalom put his arms round her neck and kissed those lips so white and cold. Godwin, with that wondrous delicacy which is so often found

among these labouring men, moved to a little distance.

‘Ye’ve been with Luke all day,’ she murmured. “Won’t ye spend one hour with your poor mother by her fire-side? I picked up some dry wood in the shaw to-day, Absalom. I know you like a nice blaze in the grate: it’s ’most as good as a meal to cheer up the heart. Ye’ll not go to night will ye, dear?’

‘It’s only the matter of a few yards, mother. I shall be home afore the fire’s burned up.’ And he kissed her again, and ran to join his companion.

Mrs. Absalom burst out crying.

About a hundred yards within the shaw, or small beechen copse, and at only a few feet distance from the footpath, was an old Roman well which had evidently been dry and disused for years, and which had not been bricked over as most of these wells are in the country.

‘There, my blind beetle!’ said Luke triumphantly. ‘That’s something like a well for ye, aint it? And it’s bin here a longish while tew. When I fust knowed on it, there was a big steane over it, and we little boys yoosed to make a path to’t through the wood, and teck a gret run and jump on’t to hear the curious noise it made. And us being full o’ meescheef one Saturday—we yoons’t to go a-school a’ Saturdays—tuck to grub-

bin' the steane out, and grubbed and grubbed till we'd got a hole big enuff to send it down edgeways, and down it wint with a yell as if a thousand devils were there and afraid o' bein' hurt wi' it.'

'Be it deep?'

'Deep as a dungeon. Throw a stone down, Absalom. It makes a curious noise jist like a railway whistle come out of it.'

Absalom picked up a large flint and dropped it down. They listened, and after some moments they heard its dull faint thud as it struck the bottom of the well.

'I didn't hear nothing like a railway whistle,' said Absalom, angrily.

'O dear! O dear!' said the old man, writhing in convulsions of laughter upon the grass. 'How mortal green little boys be! If I had said there was a ghost down there, I dessay ye'd ha' believed me, wouldn't ye?'

As he spoke they both heard a feeble trembling cry mounting from the bottom of the well.

They turned pale and listened, but could hear nothing more.

The moon crept from behind a cloud and bathed them in its cold and sickly rays. As the light stole over the mouth of the well, they thought that it was a white gaunt ghost which rose menacingly towards them.

And they turned round hastily as the breeze rustled among the leaves behind them.

‘Never let’s be fearsome!’ cried young Absalom. ‘Ghosts can only frighten. God does not let them kill. I’ll fling a bit of earth down.’

‘Be keerful, boy: be keerful. And don’t go too near the edge lest it draw ’ee down may-be.’

He threw the earth down, and again they heard the cry. This time it was longer and more plaintive than before.

‘Why, it’s a baby!’ they both cried, and looking aghast at each other. They heard it cry again, and this time they were convinced that it was really a child down the well. And yet they could not help shuddering as they heard again and again this low unearthly wail, which rose from those vast and solemn depths like a message from another world.

‘What be us to do, Absalom?’ said Luke, scratching his head, and looking vacantly around him.

‘I’ll run and tell Master Newell of Chalk-Pits,’ said Absalom, briskly. ‘You rouse the neighbours round here.’

Soon lights began to twinkle through the wood, and the hum of voices and the tramp of hasty feet announced that the news had spread. In half an hour’s time the well was surrounded by more than twenty men and women, who loudly

debated upon the best mode of extricating the child.

In this, as in most democratic councils, no one listened to any but himself, and it was fortunate that one arrived who seemed to be recognized by the peasants as a kind of sovereign.

He was a fine bluff ruddy-faced farmer, who walked with the resolute yet uncertain step of a vigorous old man.

‘Well, lads and lasses,’ he cried. ‘What’s all this splut about, eh?’

‘There’s a child down the well, Master Newell.’

‘Child! Likelier by half to be one o’ my larmbs. How did you find it out, Luke?’

‘Absalom chucked a gret steane down, master, and I thinks ye know if we throwed another down, we should tell for sartin whether it was a baby or no, for that was how we herd it the fust toime.’

‘That wouldn’t be a bad way to kill it, Luke. No, no. I have got a better way than that. Jem, where’s them cart-lines?’

A little carter-boy came forward with three coils of rope in his hand. These were cart-lines or ropes which are passed over loads of corn, straw, or wood, to secure them to the cart, and which are about fifty feet long.

The three lines were knotted carefully together, thus making a rope of a hundred and fifty feet

long. The farmer then produced a bit of tallow candle, wrapped in a slip of brown paper, tied it to the end of the rope, lighted it from a fusee-box which he carried in his pocket, and proceeded to lower it down the well amid several rural ejaculations of surprise and admiration.

‘He lets down a naked candle to see whether the air’s foul or no.’

‘If the damp puts the light out, it ’ll put a man out tew.’

‘Ay, Master Newell he thinks of everything, he does.’

The light was allowed to remain several moments in the well, and was drawn up again without its being extinguished.

‘That’s all right,’ said Newell. ‘And now who’s going down? be you, Jem?’

The little boy who had brought the ropes, answered sturdily in the negative. The process of lowering the candle had shown him that there were other dangers to be risked besides the breaking of the rope. Several other boys were invited to the post of honour, and all declined.

At this moment the group was joined by a boy and girl, each about ten years of age. The boy was a muscular little fellow, with intelligent features and a fine head of brown curly hair. The girl was a charming little brunette, with black lustrous eyes and a figure of perfect symmetry.

These were the son of Master Newell, and the little maid who looked after the poultry and the pigs.

‘Can’t I find never a boy to go down this little bit of a rope?’ said Newell. ‘I suppose I shall have to go down myself presently.’

‘There’s no call for that, master,’ said Absalom. ‘There’s plenty of men ready and willing; let I go.’

‘You’re the least weight, and you shall be the man. But it does seem curious to me that I aint got never a boy on the farm with half a morsel of pluck on him—Dall it all, I thought I *was* better off than that.’

‘So you be, father,’ said a small tenor. ‘I’s e a goin’ down the well.’

‘Loard! there’s the young farmer a-goin’ down!’ whispered the clodhoppers.

(In some parts of England it is still the custom to call the farmer *master*, and his eldest son the *farmer*.)

‘No, no!’ squeaked a thin but bold treble at his side. ‘I’m lighter than you be, Tom.’

‘Yes,’ answered the boy, proudly, ‘but you’re a girl and I’m a boy, Nancy.’

‘And I’m yoosed to carryin’ babies and you aint,’ she retorted, quick and fiery as lightning.

The men laughed, but the women groaned and spoke of the poor child who might be dying while they were thus trifling above its head.

Master Newell with the assistance of some labourers cut down a young tree, and placed it across the mouth of the well. This was to act as a purchase for the rope to work upon. It was retained in its place by two stout pegs, so driven into the soil to their heads that it rested against them. Thus the boy descending would be kept precisely in the middle of the well.

The farmer tested the strength of the ropes with an anxious brow. Then with his own hands he took off his boy's jacket and hung it on a branch. With his own hands he tied a round log of wood to the end of the rope. Upon this strange seat he placed his son, and adjured him to hold on for his life, especially when he was being drawn up.

The brave boy advanced with an unchanged face to the mouth of the black and threatening abyss. Little Nancy stood with her hands clasped, and her eyes starting from their sockets.

He grasped the round log between his hands and lowered himself into the well. Then winding his legs round the log of wood on which he sat, and his arms round the rope, he told them to let him down.

They allowed the rope to slide gently through their fingers. There was a breathless silence. If he became giddy and lost his senses he would be killed.

They had tied a lantern to his breast. They saw this sinking lower and lower till it became no larger than a spark.

At first he felt it (as he afterwards said) 'cold enough to strip a feather,' but when he had reached the bottom it became quite warm.

At length his feet touched something. He found himself standing upon a floor of brushwood, in a perpendicular tunnel whose walls were chalk streaked with rock. He lowered the lantern.

In a nest of withered leaves he saw a beautiful little child which smiled and crowed at the flashing light, and held out its little hands towards the kind brown face which peered so earnestly upon it.

He caught it in its arms. As he did so, boy though he was, he shuddered and almost dropped his burden.

For at that moment, a gust of wind rushing down the well burst open the door of the lantern and extinguished the light. And in that subterranean darkness he saw the child's eyes green and lurid as those of a wild beast, fixed upon him with a weird glare.

He shook the rope and called to them to haul him up quickly. When he reached the surface of the ground he was pale as a corpse.

The women surrounded him, tore the child from his arms, and stripped it in a moment.

They examined it carefully, and found one bruise on its back and another on its right side, but neither of any consequence. One of its cheeks was bleeding, and there were marks of dirt upon the scratch.

‘What a marcifful escape, to be sure!’ said one of the women; ‘and what a wonder it was as the flint stone missed it when the dirt hurt its poor little cheek. If it had happened to have fallen on its head, it would have killed it outright, then and there. A child’s head is no harder than an egg, when it’s bin lately born; I’ve seen the brain work under the skin when they’re bin older than this.’

‘The poor child must ha’ bin throwed down,’ said another. ‘If it had ha’ bin let down in a basket or a box, and then tiddled out, it wouldn’t ha’ had these blue bruises on it. And what a depth to fall without being killed! I expex, ye know, it’s owin’ to its bein’ so light—all gristle instead of bones—and p’raps its clothes spread out as it wint down, and so sunk its fall like.’

‘Does any of ye know whose child it is?’ asked Newell, sternly; ‘there’s bin murder tried at here, and I means to go to the bottom of it, jist as my son’s bin to the bottom of the well.’

‘Let me ha’ a look at it by the lantern,’ said Absalom’s mother, elbowing her way towards the centre. ‘Every one may see ’t but me, of course:

there's no chance for a woman as can't shove as hard as a man, and crow as loud as a cock-pheasant. Let me look at it, I say.'

The child was brought to her, and the rays of the lantern were thrown in a stream of ghastly yellow light upon its face.

The woman examined it intently, and placed her arms akimbo, and looked proudly and significantly around her.

'D'ye know who it is, mother?' said Newell.

'There's many says as I don't know nothin', and as I can't see nothin', and as I never found out nothin', and as I'se fit for nothin' 'ceptin' to cry and slobber; but I knows somethin', and I've seen somethin', and I've found out somethin', and I'se fit for somethin', which none o' you aint, you lollopin' hussies! I knows who it is that's tried to murder her own child.'

'And who be that, then?' they all cried with a curiosity which, among the women, was not unmingled with envy and indignation.

She was silent for a moment—perhaps the most triumphant of her life—then she darted a look of scorn against the females, and said, pursing up her lips, and laying a stress upon every syllable:

'It's Ann Whittick's baby.'

'And what makes ye think as she chucked it down the well?'

‘Fust, Master Newell, folks hereabouts don’t trouble themselves to chuck other pipples’ children down wells. When a child’s killed, it’s the mother as does it, for it’s only the mother as has to give it the food out of her own mouth, the clothes off her own back, and the blood out of her own breast. And, nixt, Ann Whittick was at our cottage only this afternoon, and she told me as she was a-goin’ to take a baby to Dulton Union, for that she was sick and silly of carrying of it about; and that show’d she warn’t too fond of her own flesh and blood, ye know; but who can blame her, seein’ it was a base-born? And nixt she said as she should be afraid to live here for fear of her children fallin’ down the well; and that showed the well was in her head then. And nixt, I seed her, wi’ my own eyes, walk up through the shaw, though I soon lost sight of her amongst the trees.’

‘And ye can swear it’s her child?’

‘That can I,’ she answered, firmly; ‘I know it by its gray eyes: they’re as sharp and bright as a pair of new knives. Look at ’em now, how they shine!’

The farmer directed a man to go to the police-station, at Dulton, to acquaint the inspector with the circumstances of the case. The village constable, who happened to be on the spot, was told to apply to Mr. Scarisbrick, the nearest magis-

trate, and the squire of the parish, for a warrant against her.

He himself volunteered to take charge of the child in the meantime, and intrusted it to the strong little arms of Miss Nancy, to that young lady's intense delight.

The people went home in groups, discussing the remarkable incident which they had just witnessed.

It was more than an incident : it was a miracle.

This child had escaped three deaths.

By a marvellous fortune it had fallen the depth of a hundred and fifty feet, and had not been injured.

By a marvellous fortune two men had visited its tomb, and, but for a jest, might have left it undiscovered, to perish of hunger and of cold.

By a marvellous fortune a stone, bearing death in its flight, had fallen within a few inches of its head.

This child, whose life had been saved three times in a few hours, was doubtless destined to be the instrument of some great and noble work. Providence had stretched out its hand to let him live, that he might save other souls, and breathe life into other hearts.

We shall see.

CHAPTER II.

THE RED CHAMBER.

MR. RICHARD SCARISBRICK possessed a large estate: he was Lord of the Manor of Witheridge: he was a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant of the county: he was called '*squire*:' he lived in a house noble and ancient as a castle. And he was poor as death.

The landed gentry of England are wasting away beneath a cruel curse: the taxes which our government heap upon them scourge them threadbare, and drive them from their ancestral homes.

These taxes upon road, wood, and field, fall through them upon the farmers, and through the farmers upon the poor labourers who work daily for their bread.

While the millionaires of the city remain comparatively untaxed, squires are driven to be timber-merchants—farmers to be slave-drivers—labourers to starve.

When Richard Scarisbrick had sold his first load of bark to a man who came to him from a tan-yard, he shed tears. But poverty soon blunts the feelings. He learned in time to listen almost with composure to the sound of the axe in the sacred forests of his fathers.

A victim to the popular belief that those who have large estates have fine fortunes, he had not beset himself in his youth to obtain any additional income. He had also married a young lady who brought to him, as the whole of her marriage-portion, a sweet temper, a fine pair of hands, and two sparkling eyes.

They had a son, upon whom all their hopes were centred. He it was who would redeem the ancient wealth of the family, and elevate the name of '*Scarisbrick*' to its former grandeur. They had sent him to Haileybury: he was talented, and had passed his examinations successfully. A few weeks before he had sailed for India, where parents send their sons to spend their young years in playing at *rouge-et-noir*. Fortune upon the *rouge*, death upon the *noir*.

Mr. Scarisbrick and his wife were seated in the huge oak dining-room, which was dimly lighted by a camphine lamp, and by the flickering flames of the beech-wood fire.

He was a tall, thin man, with a few gray hairs combed scantily over his head, and an expression of face which was severe, perhaps morose.

His wife had a pale face, and eyes red and hollow with much weeping.

Each seated in an arm-chair at the corner of the great fire-place gazed vacantly at the other, and neither of them spoke.

The wind, which had been rising for some hours, now burst into a savage squall. They heard it roaring through the trees of the neighbouring forest, nearer and nearer and nearer, till at last it swooped upon them like a fierce bird, and shrieked and howled round the roofs, and bellowed down the chimney, and rocked that great house like a child's cradle to and fro.

She started, almost shrieked when she heard the wind, and said, in a low voice,

'Oh, husband, our Robert is on the wide seas now.'

The father's lips quivered. He did not reply.

'What a sound the wind makes among the trees!' said the poor mother, shuddering. 'Oh, husband, it is just like the sea-waves in a storm! I saw them once: I shall never forget it. They were dark, and green, and foaming white, and, oh, so high! How I tremble for my child! It must be a dreadful night at sea.'

Again the wind whirled past, and bore a

furious gust of rain and hail against the rattling casements.

‘Oh! I wish he were at home,’ she cried: ‘I wish he were at home!’

‘As our ancestors in days of yore,’ said her husband, in a hollow voice, ‘were wont in Palestine to fight with heathens that they might win their golden spurs, so our son has left this home of idleness and want that he may return to us rich and happy.’

‘But why did we send him across the seas? Is not England full of wealth?’

‘And temptation. In this country, which contains the most beautiful women in the world, he might be led into that worst of all imprudences—a poor marriage.’

‘You do not know, then,’ she said, with a sorrowful smile, ‘that every year a hundred handsome but penniless girls are imported by their parents into India on purpose to be married?’

‘Yes; but at the solemn moment when we embraced the last time for years, and perhaps for ever, I made him swear to me on the Testament that he would not marry without first obtaining my consent.’

‘Please, sir,’ said the servant, entering, ‘the constable’s come, and there’s a woman with him, and he wants to see you.’

The magistrate's brow darkened.

'It is that infamous woman, Ann Whittick, against whom I issued a warrant last night.'

'Hark!' said Mrs. Scarisbrick; 'it is raining, and the wind is rising more and more. Do not be too harsh with this poor girl, Richard, for the sake of our child, who is exposed to a night of peril, and perhaps of death.'

'It is not permitted to the magistrate,' he answered, sternly, 'to yield to any feelings or sympathies of his own; and this is, without exception, the worst case that has ever come under my jurisdiction. Martha, tell the constable to bring the prisoner in here.'

Mrs. Scarisbrick retired to her room.

The constable came in: he was the village blacksmith—a tall, brawny, ruddy-faced man. He was followed by a young girl, of the middle height, with passive, expressionless features, but large, round and veiny eyes.

'Got our good lady!' said the man, with a brutal triumph; 'four rural p'leece after her, and the villedge constable ketches her after all! Wiped their noses nicely, aint I, sir? and all without goin' out o' my way; was drivin' along wi' some ploughshares in my cart, which I had made for Master Beenswold of Hymoor, and good ploughshares they be, when I seed a girl sitting on the bank, with an old bit of a shawl

over her head a-singin' "*My leave's a gone away to sea.*" I thort I knowed the voice, and, lookin' back, lo and behold ! it was the very 'ooman the four 'pleece has bin all day after ; so I hands her into the cart, and drives her here without delay.'

'Have you anything to say for yourself, young woman ?'

'Yes, sir, I have. I was going up the shaw with the child in my arms, when my foot tripped over a stub, and it went head foremost down the well ; and I sat by the well two hours, and listened to its crying ; and I was afeerd to tell the neighbours, lest they should say I had a-done it wilful.'

There was a pause.

'Ann Whittick, it is my painful duty to commit you to Gradborough prison, there to await your trial at the ensuing assizes.'

'Oh, sir !' she cried, 'be light with me, be light with me ; I did not do it wilful.'

She sank upon her knees, and raised towards him her clasped hands, and her eyes, which were filled with large and burning tears.

By one of those mysterious sympathies which link us with the world of spirits, and which it is beyond human power to explain, this man felt for one moment a thrill of compassion for the poor creature who, accused, one might say convicted, of the worst of crimes was kneeling before him ; and

in the same moment, in the same sensation, something—it might have been the howling of the storm without, or a sudden remembrance of his wife's last words—made him think of his absent son.

He hesitated for a moment. She saw this with the quick eyes of those who beseech, and glared at him with a look of haggard hope.

But he soon mastered himself, and now from iron he became adamant.

‘Take her away, constable, take her away.’

‘Oh, sir, I did not do it wilful, and that’s as true as I stand here an honest woman.’

‘An honest woman!’

‘Yes, sir, I’m not *in the way of life* as you thinks; I am an honest woman, sir, and never wronged a soul wherever I have been.’

‘You were born Ann Whittick; your name is Ann Whittick still, and you have a child. Is that being an honest woman?’

At this needless taunt the girl bit her lips with teeth which were sharp and white as those of a wolf.

‘You tried to murder your sin-begotten child. You did not kill it as you had hoped to do, and you left it to perish miserably from starvation. Ann Whittick, you are not an honest woman; you are a brazen woman; you are a cruel woman; you are a murderess. Constable, take her away.’

He laid his hand upon her shoulder. She flung herself from his grasp, and strode across the room towards the magistrate.

Her face was dark, and her eyes shone like coals of fire.

‘Squire Scarisbrick, I have something to say to you by yourself. Send that man away.’

He hesitated. She read fear in his eyes, and in a firm but less fierce voice :

‘You had better send him away ; I will speak before him, if you like, but you had best not drive me to that.’

After reflecting for a few moments he ordered the constable to go into the kitchen.

‘Now,’ said he, impatiently.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘if you hadna’ jeered me, and spoken hard to me, I might ha’ spared you what you be goin’ to hear now, and which will cut into ye like a knife. But ye haven’t spared me, and by ——’ (here she uttered a coarse and frightful oath), ‘I’ll not spare you.’

The magistrate began to tremble.

‘You have a son, sir—a tall young man with a brave brown beard on his lips and chin. Ah ! and a good heart,’ she murmured, ‘a good heart for all he’s so wild and mad, for all he’s left us here to starve.’

‘I have a son.’

‘He has just set sail for the Injies.’

‘Yes, it is true that he has lately sailed for India, but what has that to do with you?’

‘When your constable came up with me,’ continued the woman, calmly, ‘he found me singing. And do you know what that song was? It’s called “*My love is gone away to sea.*”’

Mr. Scarisbrick thought that she was mad, and glancing at her half fearfully, half impatiently, stretched out his hand towards the bell-rope.

‘Wait awhile, sir, wait awhile,’ she said. ‘I’ve something to tell ye which ye’ll not want heard by any but ye’rself.’

He was terrified, he could not understand this strange resolution in a woman who was a serf, a criminal. All that he could understand was that his son was involved in this mystery. Assuming an indifferent face and a firm voice he desired her bluntly to speak out.

‘I will speak out,’ she answered, sharply. ‘I will speak out without farther to do. This child as ye’ve been bull-ragging me with, and as I’m to go to jail for, has your blood in its veins, squire. *It is your son’s*: your son’s own, and your son’s alone.’

‘And that is your secret?’ said the magistrate, in a tone of relief.

‘That be my secret.’

Mr. Scarisbrick rose and opened a portfolio, from which he drew a small printed form with

several blank spaces. These blanks he began filling up with the rapidity of a man of business.

‘What be that for? what be you a writin’, Squire Scarisbrick?’

‘I am making out your committal to Gradborough jail.’

‘What! be you a-goin’ to send your own daughter to jail?’

The magistrate laid down his pen, and said :—
‘Did you suppose then, for a moment, my poor woman, that I should believe this ridiculous tale, which you have trumped up to deceive me?’

‘I will make you believe it,’ she answered, and she thrust her hand into her pocket and produced something folded in a clean white handkerchief. She opened the folds and he saw that it was a Bible. She opened the Bible and took a slip of paper from between the leaves.

This paper, creased and crumpled, contained a plain gold ring which she placed carefully on the third finger of her left hand.

Then she smoothed the paper and handed it with a mock curtsey to the astonished magistrate.

As he read it his face became livid even to his lips. He groaned heavily and sank back half fainting in his chair.

She stood before him also pale, a harsh sneer upon her face, her arms akimbo.

'This is false,' he groaned, 'this is false . . . You have forged it. Oh God! it cannot be! it cannot be!'

She placed several letters on the table before him.

'Read them,' she said, with a derisive laugh.

He opened them and tried to read. But at the first words tears of disappointment and woe streamed from his eyes, and the letters fell from his hands upon the floor.

She read them over to him.

He crouched in his chair, his eyes fixed and glassy, his fingers twining convulsively together.

These letters all began with '*My dear wife,*' and ended with '*Your affectionate husband.*'

She had shown him the certificate of her marriage. That ring which she wore had been given her by his son. He had put it on her finger at the altar.

All the dreams and hopes which he had woven round his son were shattered and torn for ever. Worse than that, he was the father of a felon, of a murderess.

He rocked himself to and fro, uttering long deep groans.

She shook him roughly by the shoulder.

'Come, sir, time creeps on. Ye must think of something or other to help me out of this, and I'll promise that afterwards ye shall never see my

face again. Your son sails for the Injies and leaves me and the child without a penny to buy us a crust. And I were a-goin' to take it to the Union when the poor blossom tumbles down the well; and, tellin' the truth, I thought it was God's doin' to save me from misery, but I suppose it was Satan did it to put bad thorts into my head and to sink me into deeper water than I was afore.'

Mr. Scarisbrick had not heard a word. He had been almost paralyzed by this terrible shock. But while all his other senses were quenched and powerless, FEAR, no longer a shadowy, ominous phantom, but a relentless reality, held him tightly in her talons, and tore the flesh from his bleeding heart.

He asked her what she wished him to do.

She sat down close to him and placed her hand on his arm. He shuddered when she touched him, this proud man, but did not move.

There during half an hour sat judge and felon in close council. He, the judge, trembling and white with fear and grief; she, the prisoner, with her coarse brown hand upon him and her face gleaming, and her grey eyes speaking as eagerly as her tongue.

* * * * *

Mrs. Scarisbrick had gone up to her room and had worked for some time, wondering how it was that her husband was occupied so long. She

wanted his company: she was alone, she was afraid. She started convulsively as the house trembled in the wind, and as the floor seemed to yield beneath her feet like the deck of a ship in a stormy sea.

After awhile she fell into a kind of slumber, which was disturbed by frightful dreams.

The storm was at its height: the branches of the forest crashed together; and sometimes an elm or some sturdy oak nodded and reeled, and fell to the ground, crushing all in its descent.

She awoke with a scream, and started to her feet, covering her face with her hands. Her husband was in the room.

‘ Richard, Richard, I have had such a dream. I saw a large ship like that in which Robert sailed tossing in the dark deep waves. There were no sails on the masts: it dived every instant into the very depths of the sea, and every instant I thought that it was lost. But it still sailed on, and seemed to sail on towards something which was black and high. I could not tell what it was: it must have been the rocks of the sea-shore. Then I heard a loud shriek from the ship, and saw men and women rushing in crowds upon the deck: I saw that the water round the ship was all white and foaming. In this white water it groaned and quivered, and at last began to sink. I heard more shrieks, and I saw wave after wave

pour over it, and each wave carried human bodies on its crest.'

Her husband seemed hardly to heed what she was saying. When she had finished, he muttered :

' We have enough misfortunes without having them in dreams.'

' Why, what is the matter ?' she said, drawing closer to him and taking his hand in hers. ' How pale you are, dear love, and your eyes are full of tears.'

He did not speak.

' Ah ! I know what it is,' she said, caressing him tenderly. ' This poor girl has made you cry : a mother must indeed have been wretched before she could try to murder her own child.'

As she said the words '*her own child*,' her voice faltered, and she went on more quickly :

' I cannot tell why, dear, but something makes me sympathise with this unfortunate creature more than I have ever sympathised with other criminals. Though I have never seen her, and though I believe that she is guilty, I pity her, and hope that she may escape the punishment of her crime. . . . Where is she now, Richard ?'

' She is locked up in the Red Chamber to-night, and to-morrow she goes to prison.'

The tone in which he spoke these words prevented her from asking any more questions.

She awoke in the dead of night, and immediately missed her husband from her side. She sat up in the bed, and stared wildly round her. And now, like a stream of fire on her mind, came the remembrance of his agitation some hours before.

A thousand suspicions whirled confusedly upon her. She stole from the room and down the passage towards the Red Chamber.

There was a light shining through the keyhole. She gnawed her lips, and became rigid. Then, with half-stooped form, with glistening eyes, with her long white dress trailing behind, she glided towards the door.

She looked through the key-hole. Yes, he was there. The woman was standing by the window, from which she had just wrenched one of the bars. She saw her husband assist this woman to tie a rope round one of the bars. She saw him take a purse from his pocket, and give it to her.

She ran down the stairs to ring the great bell, to alarm the house. She was mad with anger : she knew not what she was doing.

But as she reached the hall, her brain swam, and she fell senseless to the ground.

This was on the night of the seventeenth of April, eighteen hundred and * * *.

CHAPTER III.

THE HARE WITH THE GOLD COLLAR.

THE escape of Ann Whittick from a magistrate's house excited great consternation among the inhabitants of Gradbro'shire, and the rural police employed all their energies to discover some traces of the criminal. But they could only learn that she had reached London. In that abyss of crime they lost the faint clues by which they had traced her thither.

Mr. Scarisbrick visited farmer Newell a few days afterwards, and informed him that, as he had no children now in England of his own, and as this child had been saved so miraculously, he intended to adopt him, and offered to pay for his board and expenses if he (Newell) would bring him up upon the farm till such time as he might earn his own living.

The farmer willingly consented, and the Board of Guardians also gave a favourable reply to the squire's formal application.

Let us pass over fifteen years.

* * * *

Master Newell was striding up and down the great stone kitchen, with his arms swinging round his head like the sails of a windmill, and his face growing redder and redder every moment.

A little girl with the face of a seraphim was leaning against the table and trying to meet his eyes with a coaxing look.

‘Don’t take on so, father,’ she said; ‘it’s only one: you can spare one surely.’

‘Only one!’ roared the indignant agriculturist; ‘yes, we’ve only caught him with one. But dall his blood! How be I to know he ain’t killed forty?’

A dead hare which was lying on the dresser, with a wire round its neck, explained the subject of their conversation.

‘Well, but father, you have often said yourself that boys wouldn’t be boys if they wern’t a little mischievous.’

‘Boy’s meescheef be boy’s meeschief, and is all very well in its way if you don’t get too much on it at one time; but this aint a common boy: he’s a fairy changeling, that’s what he is. They said there was something unairthly in the way he screamed when he was down the well (and no common mortal could ha’ fallen down there, without being killed, to begin with), and there’s some-

thing unairthly about his ways now. Ever since I've had him he's bin a thorn to me. When he was a little wee child, he'd set too and kill every fly he could find in the winders, and 'ud sarve out the dogs and cats dreadful. When he'd growed up a bit, I send him out into the fields, bird-keepin': and he begged and prayed me so to let him take the long gun with him, that I did let him take it, though it was ever so much taller nor him. You won't know how to yoose it now you've got it, sed I. Oh yes, a-shall, sed he, and dall me if he wern't right; for directly he got out into the fields, he let into a flock of my house-pigeons, and cut down four, and took 'em into the villedge, and sold 'em. Then I set him to farm-work in the yard here under my own eyes: and lucky it *was* under my own eyes, for it worn't long afore I found him amusing hisself by chucking pitch-forks at my fat hogs, and shooting with a bow and arrer (however he made 'em beats me) at my faverite bantam hens.

'But what makes me most afraid on him, Annie,' said the farmer, sinking his voice, 'is the way he's got of reading a darned lot of books. It's my belief as they puts him up to no end of things as he'd never ha' thort on without. I hain't no 'pinion of that printed stuff, darter. When I opens a book it reads all black to me, and whatever's black 's bad, so folks say. And

this young George he's so dalnation clever with ut. I sent him to the day-school to get a little scholarship, 'cos the parson axed me to; but he soon beat 'em all at the three *Rs*, missus in-clooded. And now he's allers got a book in his hand, arter his day's work, or what he calls his day's work, is over. He's read all I've got in the best parlour, and there's a frighful sight on 'em there. So he gets about borrowin' a book here and a book there, this day from a parson, that day from a pedlar.—Lor!' cried the farmer in a tone of bitter irony, 'it's a treat to see him. He ain't contented with trying to set my son Tom off his work (though he'll never do that), but when I sends him up to the fields to hoe turneeps, he sets wires for hares. Old Harry seed him busy about the hedge yester-even, and this morn-ing he, bein' fust on the ground, went to look at the place, and there found this big levret ketched in a wire, and as dead as a robin.'

'Here he comes,' said Annie, looking through the window.

As she spoke the door burst open, and a tall, light-haired boy ran into the room. He wore no coat nor smock, but a waistcoat with long sleeves and a pair of corduroy trousers, bound below the knee with leather straps to prevent them from dragging in the mire. His boots were of the usual clodhopping genus: in weight four pounds

and a half, and studded with nails like the doors in the Tower of London.

In spite of this homely dress there was something in his voice, in his manner, in his very gait, which showed that he was of a different race from those who wore the same livery of servitude and poverty as himself. And there was something in his grey eyes which to a close physiognomist would have afforded food for strange surmises. In rest those eyes were cold, though they were bright; but in passion, pale lurid gleams would shoot from under the long fair lashes like those from the blade of a knife glittering in the moonlight.

‘Ah, young varment!’ cried the farmer, seizing him by the collar, ‘you’re what I’ve bin waiting for these last two hours. D’ye see this, you dog? I’ll teach ye to put gold collars round my hares’ necks.’

‘Hares are wild animals just the same as rats are,’ said the boy coldly. ‘When I made a new sort of trap and caught all your rats for you, which nobody else couldn’t touch, you didn’t make so much to-do about it.’

‘None o’ your darned book-larnin’ at me!’ bellowed Newell, choking with rage. ‘Daughter, hand me that stick, the one with the knots in; they’ll do to keep the blows off.’

‘O father!’ said Annie, imploringly.

‘There was a farmer hanged t’other day for killing a boy,’ said the youngster, imperturbably ; ‘so don’t lay it on too strong, you know, for fear of your own precious life.’

Newell stared at him aghast, and then, recovering himself, rained a heavy shower of blows upon the boy’s back and legs and shoulders, which were borne without his uttering a cry, or so much as changing colour.

‘Dall ut !’ said the farmer, wiping his forehead while a grain of wonder mingled with the vexation in his tone. ‘The gallus hasn’t yelped much over it, has he, Annie? He’s as strong and hardy as a’ground toad. Tell ’ee what, young ’un, I shall serve ’ee as I serves a dog that runs it and eats his game. I shall tie this hare under your nose and your hands behind your back to-morrow, and let ’ee nose ’ut for a day or two.’

Grumbling hoarsely, Newell stalked out of the kitchen. George, having watched him across the yard, unbuttoned his waistcoat, and, passing his hand round to his back, produced a quantity of dish-clouts and towels, with which, expecting some such castigation, he had padded himself.

Annie laughed at this, and soon bustled the linen out of sight. Then she gave him an innocent but tender kiss. The seraphim loved the young ruffian.

Next morning the farmer, true to his threat,

had him pinioned, and the hare slung under his chin.

‘It shall hang there till it rots, unless I see as you changes a bit,’ said he.

They drove him out of the farm-premises and told him to go and make a sight of himself on the parish till nooning.

He walked along the high-road, calmly enduring the indifferent witticisms and jocose cuts of the whip with which the carters saluted him as they went by with their long teams of horses.

Presently his face brightened: he saw a little boy in the distance. The latter, believing him to be one of the animals he had read of in the book of fables at school, screamed, and attempted to fly. George kicked him down, and threatened to stamp on his face unless he immediately rose and untied him.

The first impulse of a meaner mind would have been to throw the hare over the nearest hedge. But George, on finding himself once more a free man, bribed the boy with a halfpenny to say nothing of what had happened, and hid the leveret under the smock-frock which he happened to be wearing that day.

He looked at the sun. It wanted about an hour to noon-day—his dinner-time. He resolved to stroll about, and amuse himself birds’ nesting. Accordingly he walked across the fields to a small

common which was covered with furze bushes, stunted thorn trees, and yews.

As he entered the grass-road which ran through the middle of the common, he overtook a man who was walking slowly along looking on all sides of him, and stopping at every few steps to listen. He had a short black pipe in his mouth, and on his back a huge bundle, which was as large and heavy as a pedlar's pack but of a very different shape.

George's curiosity was roused. He felt instinctively that this was a brother-sportsman. But instinct could not tell him what it was he carried on his back, or why it was that he stopped so often to listen.

The mysterious sportsman had now reached a small 'clearing,' where the cottagers had been permitted to cut some furze for their firing. Without observing George, the man threw down his bundle and stood upright for a moment to stretch his shoulders. Then he stooped and began untying his bundle. George lay down upon the grass.

When he saw a large net produced his eyes began to shine, and lying on his stomach with his face between his two hands he watched him eagerly. He saw the net, which was about twelve yards square, spread flat upon the ground, and there secured by four small iron pins (called *stars*),

which, however, left a considerable space of net on either side unoccupied. These were the *sides* of the net. Then the man placed something covered with a green baize cloth in the centre of the net, and having carefully examined his paraphernalia uncoiled a long line which was looped and run within the edges of the net, and raised the green baize, disclosing a goldfinch in a wire-cage.

‘Hollo! young shaver,’ said the man, angrily; ‘what are yer a-doing here?’

‘I’m doing the looking-on part—if you don’t mind, leastways.’

‘Oh! I don’t mind. Come behind this bush with me, and then yer won’t frighten ’em away.’

They both hid themselves behind a bush, the bird-catcher holding the line in his hand, and peeping through the interstices of the foliage. As soon as the goldfinch felt the sun and light it began to sing.

‘That’s the call-bird,’ whispered the man. ‘He’ll draw a lot more presently—with luck.’

And in fact, after a few minutes the adjacent trees and bushes resounded with chirpings and carollings.

‘Quite like Hexeter Hall, aint it?’ said the man.

‘As like as two peas,’ returned George, promptly.

The birds gathering courage began to flutter

down upon the net, which soon swarmed with linnets, yellow-hammers, and tit-larks. But the fowler was not satisfied. 'I want some bullfinches,' said he.

'I can hear 'em piping all round,' said George. 'There's plenty about these thorn-trees.'

Presently there were six cock-bullfinches in the net, which began to present the appearance of an aviary. They were beautiful little birds, with their blue bullet heads and their scarlet breasts. They were clothed in red and purple like the kings of ancient Tyre.

The man gave his rope a sharp tug, and the flaps or wings of the net closed over the cage, and held them all prisoners. The poor birds beat themselves fiercely against the net, uttering piercing cries, while the call-bird still sung, as if triumphantly, from his wire-cage.

These were gathered by the large brown hand of the ensnarer, and with George's assistance were conveyed into a light hamper which formed part of the fowler's equipage.

'D'ye know of any nestesses round here,' he said, cutting short the young gentleman's expressions of delight. 'I don't mean blackbird and thrushes, and them common sorts. D'ye know of a bottle-tit's anywheres.'

'Yes, I know of a bottle-tit's fifty yards from where we are now. Just ready for eggs.'

‘I don’t want no eggs ; but I’ll give yer a pint o’ beer for the nest.’

George, who had been going to show him the nest for nothing, immediately declared that he couldn’t afford to part with it under sixpence.

The bargain being struck at a four-penny piece, the man was conducted to the spot, and shown the nest, imbedded in a little bunch of gorse. Instead of tearing it out he cut the branch with his knife, thus preserving it, furze and all.

The bottle-tit, or long-tailed tit, (*mecistura vulgaris*,) builds the most beautiful of all English nests. It is oval in shape like a leather-bottle ; the outside is one mass of that crisp white moss which one finds on apple-trees and old gate-posts ; there is one tiny hole, the circumference of a child’s finger, and the interior is choked to its very mouth with soft and balmy feathers.

These nests sell at a high price in towns to egg-collectors, closet-naturalists, and buyers of curiosities.

‘D’ye know of any more nests, young ’un ? Some with bigger eggs in, yer know ?’

‘Oh, you mean some of the other sort.’

This is a cant term among poachers for those eggs which are preserved by the hand of the law.

The man nodded, and looked at George with his right eye only.

‘I know of one nest: thirteen eggs: old bird sitting.’

‘That’s the style, Mary. Bring ’em to me, my lad, and I’ll give you a shilling.’

‘If you’ll give me a shilling I’ll show you the nest, and let you take it like you did the bottle-tit’s.’

‘How am I to know yer won’t peach on me afterwards? Yer’ve got a pair of queer grey eyes, my young bloke. I’m always keerful how I do business with grey eyes.’

George pulled the hare out from under his smock.

‘There!’ said he, ‘I sell this to you for eighteen-pence, and then one ’ull be as deep in the dirt, as t’other’s low in the mire.’

‘By jingo! you’re too good for a hole like this. Sit down with us and have a bit of dinner, and we’ll see if we can’t hit out something better between us.’

At this the boy laughed, and sang in a clear sweet voice,

Good luck to every gentleman
That wants to buy a hare;
Good luck to every poacher
That wants to set a snare;
Bad luck to every gamekeeper
That will not sell his deer,
For it’s my delight, on a shiny night,
In the season of the year.

* * * *

'Six o'clock, and that young gallows-bird aint come in yet,' said farmer Newell, patrolling the kitchen, and frothing with rage.

'Oh, don't call him that, father,' said Anne.

'Not call him that! It's the name the devil christened him with.'

'O father!'

'Didn't Mother Wooton and lots more on 'em as saw the child and looked arter the child, in this house, say and swear as there was a mark of a gallows on the back of its neck, as plain as day? I'll write to Squire Scarisbrick and tell him he must send the boy elsewhere.'

'But he will mend, father, he will mend.'

'Mend! Ay, as small beer do in summer. Mend! Not afore I've broke him of some of his dalnation bad habits; and I doubt whether any stick's stout enough to do that. I can't bend him now he's only a twig, and what he'll be when he's an oak I don't like to think on. No, Annie, he must go.'

'Oh, do not write to the squire just now, father. It will be pouring trouble upon him if you do. His wife's sick unto death, they say; and all for her son, who was drowned on the high seas fifteen years ago.'

'How was that, then, Annie?' said Newell, in a gentle voice. 'I don't remember that.'

'It was mother told me,' said Annie, 'only a few days before she died. 'She said it was on the seventeenth of April, eighteen hundred and * * * * *: there was a storm that night which blew down the great oak in the Warren wood that lies there now, for the squire would never have it touched. And months afterwards they heard that the steamer-ship their son was in had been wrecked, and that not a soul had been saved. And the squire's lady she said nothing when she heard these sad news, but she turned white and hung down her sweet, gentle face: and the neighbours tell me that all these fifteen years she has been growing paler, and thinner, and sadder, and yet lives on more like a ghost than a Christian.'

'No wonder, no wonder. If I should lose Tom I don't know what would come to me. An only son's like a prop to one: and if you take away the prop the old house falls down to the ground.'

'Then you will wait and try him a little longer,' said Annie, coaxingly.

'Yes,' said the farmer, 'I will wait.'

* * * * *

After three days Newell wrote a letter to Mr. Scarisbrick, to inform him that George Messenger had disappeared, and that all searches and inquiries had hitherto proved fruitless.

His letter was 'crossed' by one from Mr. Scarisbrick, in which he hoped that the boy was well, and requested that he might be dressed in his Sunday clothes, and be sent over to Withe-ridge with as little delay as possible.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

It was evening, in London : it was raining ; the pavement shone under the glittering gaslights as if it had been smeared with oil. The streets were mud and water, which a band of men, in tarpaulin hats and coarse blue jackets, were scraping to a heap, and piling into a cart, with huge wooden instruments, half spade, half rake.

It is quite true that the streets of London are paved with gold, for by their very refuse are realized enormous sums.

Although the weather was so turbulent, the streets were thronged with men and women, whose speedy walk and anxious looks explained that it was *Business*, that patron saint of the great City, which had called them from their warm homes, their families, and their friends.

But I have one to show you who had no warm home, no family, no friends. He was standing

by the corner of Charing Cross, where a few persons are always to be seen waiting for the omnibuses which pass thereby

He had long fair hair, which fell down upon his shoulders in clustering curls; his features were even and regular: they would have been handsome had they been fuller and less dejected. His eyes were clear and grey, and were now sunk upon the pavement, or upon what he was holding in his hands. He was dressed in an old brown *dudley*, battered, brimless, and a dirty smock frock, which fell below his knees, as if to hide the corduroy trousers which hung down in rags, that were splashed and encrusted with mud.

He held in his hands a large basket filled with birds' nests and their speckled eggs.

A gentleman in an Inverness cape, and with a green silk umbrella over his head, stopped before him, and said :

‘ Well, boy, have you got these to sell ?’

The boy started from his reverie, and smiled when he saw a gentleman looking at his wares. He also made a bow, by touching his forehead with the tips of his fingers, and waving his hand towards him with the palms uppermost.

This mode of salutation is far more graceful than the tug of the forelock (*male*), or sudden twinge of the loins (*female*), which are beginning to supersede it among the lower classes of the

south of England, in the same manner as the picturesque and voluptuous kerchief has given place to the hideous hook-and-eyed cotton print.

‘Yes, sir,’ he said, smiling, and showing his white teeth, ‘they are all to sell.’

‘What are these?’ said the gentleman, pointing to a nest.

‘I’ll tell you what they all are, sir, then you won’t be picking and choosing in the dark. These you pointed to are dish-washers, sir; wagtails some call ’em, ’cos their tails are always a twiddling like a woman’s tongue: they’re threepence. These are the butcher-birds, or hedge-murderers; they’re pretty eggs, ain’t they, sir?—just the colour of rich cream under the spots—but the birds, they’re rank villains: they’ll ketch little birds, and spike ’em on a thorn, just as you or I’d stick a pin through a cockchafer; and then they take to stripping the feathers off on ’em, and eat ’em up, mossel by mossel. These be house-sparrows, and their eggs vary in colour most of all birds: some are quite white, though not often, and others almost black: they’re twopence. Then this is the golden-crested wren’s nest, with ten eggs; they’re very rare indeed, sir, and the eggs are so tiny and brittle, it’s the hardest work in the world to blow ’em without breaking ’em; it’s the smallest bird in Europe, I’ve heard say, and it’s sixpence, being rare. This is a cuckoo’s egg

and that's a curiosity, so it's fourpence. The cuckoo don't make no nest of its own, but lays its egg in the hedge-sparrer's nest, and the sparrer sets on it, and warms and hatches it along with the rest; so the young cuckoo is bred up with the young sparrers; but when he gets strong and hungry, he gets spiteful too, and hoists all the t'others out of the nest, and so gets all the food to hisself. Which would you like to buy, sir? the hedge-murderer's is the prettiest, but the cuckoo and the gold-crest be the rarest.'

'Well, I'm afraid I can't buy any now, my good boy. How am I to take them home in this rain?'

'Take 'em wherever you like to-morrow, sir. It don't make much odds to me which walk I take.'

The gentleman said something about another day, and walked on.

A cloud came over the boy's face, and then a sneer crossed his lips.

'Not one of the buying sort,' he muttered; 'stopped to talk to me to amuse hisself. But never mind,' and he shook the rain gaily from his smock, 'if he's done me no good, he's done me no harm.'

And he tried to sing, but his voice was weak and hoarse, and a tear trembled in his eye as he listened to his own futile efforts.

There were two ladies waiting for a Brompton omnibus.

‘Look at that poor boy,’ said one of them ; ‘how he shivers in the rain, and his hands and face are quite blue with the cold. Ah ! Emma Jane, how thankful you ought to be that you have a good dinner to eat and a good bed to sleep in when you get home.’

Emma Jane, who was the younger and the less ill-favoured of the two, proposed that they should ask him what it was that kept him out in the rain, etc. The other, possibly as much from curiosity as from sympathy, agreed.

The boy made them his rustic obeisance, for privation had already taught him to be patient, and polite to all. He knew that ladies seldom bought eggs except when they had children with them. Still he argued that it would be foolish to throw the shadow of a chance away.

‘Ah ! you come from the country,’ said Emma Jane.

‘Yes, ma’am, I’m Gradbrough born, and Gradbrough bred, till a couple of months ago when a bird-catcher persuaded me that I could better myself by coming to Lunnun, though I can’t see that I have done it yet.’

‘And is this your trade ?’

‘Yes, ma’am. When I first came up the man used to bed and board me, and give me things to street-sell for him, but he fed me bad and treated

me ill when I had black days ; and besides I seed no chance of gettin' a penny to lay by to get me new clothes, so we parted company and I does business now on my own hook.'

'Where do you get your eggs from?'

'Mostly from Witham and Chelmsford in Essex. Chelmsford is about thirty miles from Westminster Bridge and Witham eight miles further. I go out of town fer 'em three times a week. I start generally about dusk and walk all night. I like that better than walking under the sun ; besides one can't rest in the night-time. When I get there I *skipper* it under a hedge and get a couple of hours' sleep. And then I set to work : sometimes I have to climb tree after tree and find no eggs in the nests, or else young birds, which are no use to me. And when I've been away two nights and a day, and worked hard and got a lot of eggs, I've a hard matter to sell them. Some in our trade have what they call a connection, you know, ma'am ; they get their orders beforehand, and so they can sell their eggs as soon as they've got 'em. But I've been on the streets two days, and it's been raining so hard that I have scarcely sold anything at all. There's been no young gentlemen about, it being wet, and they're my best customers ; and if I don't sell anything to-night, I'm sure I don't know what I shall do. I have had to go without my bite

of bread since the morning ; and worse than that I shall have to sleep in one of those dreadful lodging-houses. I slept in one once when I was in bad luck as I am now, and I prayed to God that I might never have to sleep in one again. I generally give up trading long afore now ; but I've gone on late to-night in the bare hope of selling one more nest.'

'Poor child!' murmured the lady.

The other lady had taken a pace from them, and was looking anxiously down the street.

'And the nesting season is nearly over now ; half the nests I climbed to last time had young birds.'

'What shall you do then when the winter comes?'

At the word *winter* the boy shuddered and looked at the lady with a scared face. It would seem as if he had not thought of it before ; his eyes rolled in troubled thought, his pale lips quivered, and a tear trickled down his cheeks as he said in a low husky whisper—

'Beg and starve.'

The lady bent her head. At that moment her companion gave a scream, and waved her umbrella in the air.

'Please give me one penny, ma'am, to save me from that dreadful place.'

'Aunt, aunt!' cried the girl, 'you've got my

purse in your reticule ; lend it to me for a moment.'

'My dear child, what are you waiting for? we shall be late for dinner.'

'One penny, only one penny,' moaned the boy piteously.

'Now, Emma Jane, do leave off chattering with that dirty little urchin. I can't get at your purse now without wetting myself through. Give him something another day.'

'Now ladies!' bawled the conductor.

The door was held impatiently open, and closed upon the skirts of Good-Intentions the Irresolute, and Pious-Words the Uncharitable.

The Pharisees and Levites of Christian countries improve upon those of ancient Judea. When they see suffering, they do not trouble to turn their heads, or to pass over to the other side, they brush it with their skirts and even stop to taunt it with vain hopes.

The poor vagrant looked after them wistfully. Then casting round him one hopeless glance he walked slowly down Parliament-street. It was still raining ; he was drenched to the skin, his feet were sore with walking, and all his limbs ached. He was weary ; but he feared his night's lodging more than he feared the cold heavy rain and the solitude of the streets. And yet he knew that he must sleep or try to sleep, or he would faint

under his next day's work. It was no use waiting any longer in the streets, there was no one to buy, no one to help.

He crept down the streets, counting the flagstones, and standing still sometimes as if he was thinking. Presently his face brightened and he walked quicker, whispering to himself, 'There's no harm in trying anyhow.'

He entered a large low building in New Pye-street. At the side of the passage there was a glass window drawn up, and a kind of ledge or counter on which were two piles of small round tickets. Behind the counter was a microscopic room, just large enough to hold a deformed old man and a brawny repulsive-looking woman.

'Fourpenny or twopenny?' said the man, laying a hand on each pile of tickets. 'Twopenny, I suppose?' he added, with a keen glance at the soaked and dingy smock, which had already begun to steam under the heat of the gaslights.

'No,' said the boy, boldly, 'I'm a fourpenny customer.'

'Oh, you are one of the grand ones, are ye?' said the man in a jocular tone, pleased to find himself twopence richer in prospective. 'Going to have a sixpenny touch, I dessay. Fourpence for bed, halfpenny for hot-water in the morning, and three halfpence for a drop of *something short* now—eh?'

‘I want to see his money first,’ said the woman, folding her arms upon her huge breast, and staring at him mistrustfully.

‘Oh, we shall see his money before he sees his bed, you may depend upon that, ducky. Now then, young duffer, fork out.’

He put his hand into one of the pockets of his frock, and after some fingering and searching, produced a little bunch of halfpence, which he handed to the man with a timid look.

‘Threepence,’ said the man, counting them over. ‘That’s one penny too little.’

‘He hasn’t got another; I can see that in his eye,’ sneered the woman.

‘It’s only one penny,’ implored the boy. ‘Can’t you trust me for that, sir? I will pay you, indeed I will.’

‘You know our prices, and you know our rules,’ said the man, sternly. ‘You know that you can’t get into that helaborate palace up-stairs for threepence, and you know that we never trusts nobody.’

‘Well, then, look here,’ said he, eagerly, and showing them his basket. ‘This is how I make my living. Will you take some of these and keep them till I pay you the penny back again? Oh, please do, sir.’

‘Birds’ eggs!’ said the lodging-house keeper, looking at them curiously, and turning them over

in his hands. 'Birds' eggs! Who'd have thought now to see them in a back slum in Westminster! Well, London *is* a place, to be sure.'

'You can take the cuckoo's if you like—that's the best one; or you can take the hedge-murderer's or the golden-cristed; or which one you like. I don't care which it is, so long as I don't have to sleep in that horrible room.'

'I used to go after them when I was a white-headed little chuck years on years ago. It makes my blood run to look at 'em: they 'minds me of my old mother, and how she used to scold me because it was so cruel she said—bless her kind heart! I tell you what, I don't mind taking one for the penny just to make me think over them days again.'

'This is a very pretty one,' said the boy, taking a thrush's egg from its round deep nest. It really was one of the prettiest, and (oh! the cunning little varlet) one of the cheapest and commonest in the whole collection.

'Begging your pardon, James,' interposed the lady at his side, 'you won't do any such thing. A fine thing if you're to spend your money in that style. Give the boy his odd penny, and send him up to the twopenny room. If you're afraid of going among the roughs,' she said, turning to him savagely, 'pawn the shirt off your

back. That would be more use to us than your rotten eggs.'

'I *have* pawned the shirt off my back,' he cried, tearing open his frock, and showing them his bare neck and breast, and the high bones which seemed as if they would soon burst through his delicate white skin.

'Then go steal,' she said, surlily. 'Stand aside a moment, and you'll see how things are done here.'

A man came in as she spoke, and drawing a large piece of bacon from his pocket, flung it down upon the counter.

'How much d'ye want for it?' said the lodging-house keeper, weighing it with his eyes.

'Sixpence.'

'Sixpence for a bit of *sawney*! (thieved bacon). We can't give more than fourpence in this shop, my buffer.'

'Hand it out, then, and be cursed to you. You're worse than thieves you are, yer niggardly skunks.'

'Going to lay it out on a bed,' said the man, imperturbably.

'Twopence on it. 'Tother I'll drink: there's no getting to sleep in that filthy hell unless one gets half drunk over your *jiggered gin*.'

Two children then came in. One of them paid

for his bed and supper with fish *got from the gate* (stolen from Billingsgate), and the other with *flesh found in Leadenhall* (meat stolen from the butchers' stalls in that market).

'That's the way to get your grub and your shake-down,' said the woman with a maternal air. 'Some on 'em brings a *Moses* (second-hand wearing apparel): some prigs tea from the docks and brings it; and there's many as brings us *hens-and-chickens*.'

(These are the cant terms for publican's larger and smaller pewter measures, which go to the furnace and the melting-pot, instead of to the fire and the dripping-pan).

The boy took back his penny mournfully, and went down the passage till he came to another glass sash, and behind it a bar-room, a trifle larger than the ticket-room.

'The man was right,' he muttered; 'one can't sleep up there without drinking something.'

He laid down a penny, and asked for a glass of ale.

Now a good glass of ale is not to be expected for a penny, especially at the bar of a low lodging-house, the watchwords of which are Thievery and Extortion; and yet the ale was bright and transparent, with froth mantling, like whipped cream, to the surface, and a seasoned twang of old age tickling the palate as it flowed sparkling past.

Had the barman made a mistake, and drawn him some of his own private tap? Innocent consumer of London draught, listen to the history of this glass of ale.

The original butt had come, *imprimis*, from some indifferent brewers in Westminster, who having made it with adulterated malt, adulterated hops, adulterated sugar, etc., had adulterated it a little, in its wholesale form, in order to bring it down to the very low price which this very low lodging-house could afford to give.

There arrived, it had been first drenched with water, which turned the one butt into three, and which deprived the beer of strength, of flavour, and of froth. These were to be restored by science, in her most dangerous form. 'Twas the same spirit of science which, in the days of the De Medicis and of De Brinvilliers, ruled proudly in the palaces of kings, and in the castles of the noblest knights—a spirit with glittering and snakish eyes—clothed in mystic raiments, spangled with hieroglyphics and with meretricious gems. Then she rode through the streets in her golden chariot, and stood erect to the view of all, her arms filled with bleeding hearts; in one hand a phial, in one hand a knife.

But now she is a withered and decrepit hag, who, stricken with poverty and clothed in foul rags, skulks behind the counters of tradesmen,

and doles forth disease and death in almost every morsel that is eaten, in almost every drop that is drunk.

This solution of beer wanted strength, flavour, and froth.

Coculus indicus, henbane, opium, and the Bohemian rosemary replaced the deluged malt.

With coculus indicus poachers 'hocuss' trout; with henbane Socrates was murdered; with opium Chinamen commit a tedious suicide; and one sprig of the Bohemian rosemary will produce a raving madness.

Thus the glass of ale was made strong.

Aloes, quassia, wormwood, and gentia supplied the deficiency of hops. Thus the glass of ale was made bitter.

Ginger, cassia-buds, and capsicum, gave the aroma.

Treacle, tobacco-juice, and burnt sugar, the colour.

Alum, copperas, and salt of tartar, the froth.

Oil of vitriol, the transparency and the age.

When the poor bird's-nest seller had finished this glass of beer, he felt it shoot like fire to his head, and said to himself, 'Ah! there's nothing like good strong beer after all.'

Before going up-stairs he went into the kitchen of the lodging-house. This was a long gaunt

room, its walls covered with disgusting figures, and its floor inches deep in dirt. Here the thieves and cadgers, who frequented the place, enjoyed their supper before going to bed, and here they might be seen employed in a dozen various occupations. One roasting a hare before the fire, another mending an umbrella, a third washing his shirt in a hand-basin, but most of them standing round the fire-place, talking together in whispers, and smoking their short black pipes.

The boy's attention was arrested by two women who were seated in one corner of the room, and who, by their dress and demeanour, were evidently visitors, attracted to the spot by curiosity, or some other motive.

The younger of the two was quite a girl, and was very handsome; the other was an elderly woman with hair just turning grey.

They were glancing at him, and whispering to each other.

'What is the use?' said the old woman, in a weak, tremulous voice.

'Every use in the world. I can see by his face that he is no common boy. You can see no farther than his dirty smock-frock. Look at his eyes, how deep and grey they are! and his forehead is high and white, and his hands are small and delicate; and oh! my good soul, did you

ever see such fingers? they are as long and taper as a woman's. Why those alone would help him to a fortune. Depend upon it, his father was a gentleman, whoever his mother may be.

As she said this with a gay laugh, her companion hung her head, and looked gloomily on the ground.

'However, I am determined to do it,' she said. And she beckoned to the bird's-nest seller, who had been watching them keenly, as if he had guessed from their looks and gestures that they had been speaking of him.

As he approached, an extraordinary thing happened. The old woman and the boy started both at the same moment; and each gazed earnestly into each other's eyes, which sparkled with curiosity and surprise. Thus they stood for one moment, as if transfixed by a sudden thought, and petrified into stone.

But only for a moment. The woman turned impatiently aside as if to sneer at this weakness which appeared reasonless because it was intuitive.

There is always a reason for these magnetic impulses which, instead of welcoming and cherishing, men drive by main-force from their hearts.

'What is your name, my lad?' said the girl.

'George Messenger.'

'And do you like this kind of life?'

'I should like it better, ma'am, if I could see

my way towards something for the winter: the birds don't have no families in the cold weather.'

'You see,' she said, turning, 'the child's as sharp as a needle. And he has pluck at heart too for all his poor thin body, and his pale face.'

'I know what you street-boys are,' she continued. 'After roaming about as you are used to do you cannot bear to be kept in-doors. Do you know how to read and write?'

'Yes, I'm very fond of reading, ma'am. Writing I don't like so well. One's such a while getting over a little ground: but when the books are nice ones, I feel as if I could sit still and read on for ever a'most.'

'Ah!' said the girl, suddenly, and looking into him with her small round eyes, which glistened like a cat's.

'And what kind of books do you like best?'

'Those that have lots of battles in 'em,' said the boy, warmly. 'I loves them battles, dearly. And sea-books, I can read them, 'specially when there's pirates'

She gave a murmur of assent or pleasure. It was like the purring of a tigress.

'And travellers as fights with wild beasteses—and big knights in black armour—I've seen pictures of 'em running coves through with big skewers—and all them sort o' things. Oh, I can read and like any book as makes one move over

it: but I hates them as keep on talking and talking over nothing: readin' words no use if you don't read something fat inside of it: you might as well try to feed off a bladder filled with air.'

'If you will come to this address at seven o'clock to-morrow evening,' she said, writing something down on a blank card, 'I think that I might be able to do you a service.'

As she gave him the card, she slipped a shilling into his hand, and left him in a state of delicious stupefaction.

CHAPTER V.

ALL'S FAIR IN TRADE.

THE next evening at seven o'clock George Messenger presented himself with a faint, single tap at the door of No. 3, Ryle Street—an obscure thoroughfare between Piccadilly and Regent Street.

He was admitted by a maid-servant, who ushered him immediately into the back-kitchen, where a huge tub awaited him, steaming like a Christmas joint, and (far more grateful sight!) a suit of neat second-hand clothes hanging on the back of a Windsor chair.

In an hour's time he was shown upstairs to the first floor, and the ladies who were seated there together were quite charmed with his appearance.

He had a well-knit figure, a white, glossy skin, a fine, almost feminine cast of features, and hair which, now that it was cleaned and combed, shone like virgin gold.

In the intervals of conversation he glanced complacently at his new clothes, as a scholar surveys his bombazine gown, and a bishop his first pair of lawn sleeves.

The young lady, whose name the servant told him was Miss Chatfield, and who appeared to be the real mistress of the house, asked him several questions about his former life, and soon extracted the history of all his crimes and troubles. At first he touched very gingerly upon the former, but Miss Chatfield seemed to view misdemeanours in so charitable a light that he felt emboldened to make a clean breast of it.

She laughed to tears when he told her about the hare being tied round his neck, and his selling it after all, and inveighed against the game-laws as bitterly as any gaitered abolitionist could have done.

She concluded by saying that it would be just as sensible to make laws for birds' eggs as for hares; and that so far from blaming a starving fellow-creature for taking one wild animal out of a wood which perhaps held hundreds of them, she could scarcely blame him for taking a sheep, or a goose, or a fowl from those that were over-rich to give to those that were over-poor.

There she paused, as if waiting for him to answer her. He observed that her eyes were

searching him through and through, while the old woman was gazing at him with a peculiar expression of tenderness and pity.

He said that it was of course very hard to have no bread, and no means of getting any: but still he thought honest people were the happiest: and they were often the richest, too, for he'd heard a thief say only a few nights before that an honest shilling went a way farther than a stolen crown: and certainly the thieves he had seen were very poor-clothed, and dirty, and hungry. It did not seem as if their trade thrived with them.

At this the old lady smiled, and Miss Chatfield did not answer.

Then the former, whose name was Mrs. Appleton, asked him if he had any father and mother. And when he said that he could not remember either, and that when he had asked about them he had short answers given him, she started, and asked him quickly from what part of England he came—a point which he had omitted in his narrative.

Her emotion did not escape the observation of George Messenger, who, being prone to give lies the preference to truth in matters of policy, replied that he was from Shropshire.

At this Mrs. Appleton looked disappointed, and Miss Chatfield resumed her cue.

'I shall send you out to sell different articles for me,' she said, 'and give you a little on all that you sell. Then as you get your bed, board, and clothes for nothing, you will be able to lay by every farthing that you gain.'

George saluted her with his head, his hand, and a segment of his heart.

That night he slept in a comfortable bed, and the next morning enjoyed a comfortable breakfast *tête-à-tête* with Mary the housemaid. When he had finished he was told that the mistress wanted to see him.

She was at breakfast. On the side-board was a glass vase with a dozen gold and silver fish in it.

'Do you know anything about those?' she said, pointing to them.

'Yes, ma'am, I know everything about the street-trade in live-stock, and about most other street-trades too, for when I could afford it I used to go to a sixpenny lodging-house in Orchard Street, or else have fourpennyworth at the Drury Chambers; and there's a great many in all the street-trades goes to both them places: and by asking questions, and listening to their "patter," I got put up to a pinch of snuff or two. You see, ma'am, I was always looking out for a better trade than birds' nests.'

‘Well, now, what is that bargain worth?’

George went up to the sideboard and examined them with a critical air.

‘They were brought here this morning,’ she added, with a significant look at Mrs. Appleton, who just then entered the room, and with whom she spoke in a low voice, pointing at the fish.

‘They’d fetch two shillings a pair, ma’am : but here’s one pair of large silvers that ought to be seven-and-sixpence by themselves. Large silvers are scarcer than large golds. What I should do with these would be to walk Kensington way. A little matter out of town they say is the best buying line for these. I should walk along the street crying them, and where I saw any children at the window I should knock at the door, for children crave rarely after gold-fish. I should want five shillings the pair, and come down to the florin, if driven to it—not without. And if I’m asked where they came from I shall say that some on ’em were brought from China, and some from Portugal, and some from the Injies. Then they’ll be sure to buy ’em.’

‘Oh, you would do that!’ said Miss Chatfield : and her eyes sparkled.

‘All’s fair in trade, ma’am. And the fun on it is that the Essex fish are the best of all, being bred in cold water, while t’others have to be bred

in warm ponds. But did the man bring a hand-net with the fish, ma'am? It don't do to mess 'em with your hands.'

'No, but I dare say we have such a thing. My dear,' she said, with a curious smile, 'will you go to *the lumber-room* and see if you can find one?'

In a quarter of an hour Mrs. Appleton returned with a bundle of nets of fine and various-coloured cordage with handles of stained wood. These, the boy said, he might be able to sell with the fish, and informed them that the legitimate wholesale price was three shillings a dozen, and that therefore he should decline to sell them under sixpence a-piece.

Mary crammed a huge dinner into his pocket, and at dusk he returned, having succeeded beyond his expectations. His handsome face, his clean clothes, and his brisk tongue and manners, had won him plenty of customers.

In three days the vase was empty, and that same evening he was called up to the drawing-room and regaled with a glass of spirits-and-water. His mistress praised him to the skies.

'And did you tell all your customers,' she asked, 'that your fish had come from foreign parts?'

'Yes, ma'am; I told 'em this one came from

one place and that one from t'other place. Oh, I gulled 'em nicely. . . I hope it wasn't wrong,' added the shrewd urchin, who had heard of traps set for honesty.

'Oh,' she said, with a laugh, 'all is fair in trade. You must think me very squeamish. Why, when I was your age I used not to be so very particular.'

And she told him a score of stories about the pilferings of her childhood, and in such a manner that George did not understand that these were thefts which she described.

He went to bed that night in a state of mind at once happy and confused. Happy, because he had five shillings in his trousers' pocket; confused, because he was not accustomed to whiskey-toddy, and because the doctrine which Miss Chatfield's anecdotes appeared to inculcate were so different from those which Master Newell had driven into him by word and stick.

After much profound thought, he came to the conclusion that the citizens of the metropolis and the rustics of the country, just as they dressed in two different styles, so viewed questions of morality from two different points of view.

During the next week he was employed in selling second-hand telescopes and opera-glasses about the streets. This was a duller trade than

the gold and silver fish. He had to stand all day on Tower Hill or the Coal Exchange and waylay the sea-faring men as they rolled by. He found them very hard customers to deal with in that line of business. Put a telescope into a sailor's hands, and he returns to his own element. From a lump of salt sea-pork thrown ashore for land-sharks to nibble at he becomes a triton, an ocean god, a giant of the waves.

At the end of the week George returned disconsolate. 'The sailor-gentlemen,' he said, 'always would insist on trying his telescopes from the Tower Hill or the Custom House Quay before they would make the least bid for them: and when they did make a bid they showed themselves much more at home in the matter than he was. Even when they were drunk they seemed to understand them just as well. He supposed they had used themselves to look through telescopes when they were drunk aboard ship.'

And as for opera-glasses, he said that was quite a dead letter. 'Opera-glasses!' they said. 'What do we want with opera-glasses? Better wait till we've got opera-boxes.'

'Well, I must start you in another line, I suppose,' said his mistress. 'But I should have preferred waiting till you had sold all the telescopes, as you did the fish.'

‘I will keep on till I’ve sold ’em all, if you please, ma’am ; but I think that I could do more good with something else.’

‘Very well,’ she said, ‘I suppose we must look into the lumber room again and see what we can find. But mind ye, my lad,’ she added, in a severe tone, and laying her hand firmly upon his shoulder, ‘I will have no picking and choosing. If you want to keep with me, you must do my business, and do it my way.’

George assured her that she should never have occasion to find fault with him.

‘My dear,’ she said, to Mrs. Appleton, ‘will you go to the lumber-room and fetch those fiddles?’

Mrs. Appleton went out slowly, and returned with six fiddles, which had all the appearance of ancient and valuable violins.

‘Now, George,’ she said, ‘these fiddles are worth about half-a-crown a-piece, and I shall expect you to sell them for about a sovereign a-piece. I shall dress you as a German musician : you will then reel into a public-house as if you were drunk, and say you must have some money, and if you can’t get it any other way, you must sell the old Cremona which your father gave you before you left your *vater-land*. Then somebody will try to take advantage of you, and will offer you a

low price for it: and you must not take less than a sovereign, for that would be a very low price for a real Cremona. Do you think you can do that?’

‘Oh, yes, ma’am ; I could dance *The Drunken Parson* better than e’er a man or boy in the village.’ And he explained to her that *The Drunken Parson* was a popular rustic dance performed by one man to the music of a fiddle. A jig or hornpipe was played, and a lively step danced: this was to represent the elastic stage of intoxication: after so many bars it gave place to a slow solemn measure, when the dancer staggered and reeled and rolled on the floor after the fashion of drunkards when the liquor has descended to their legs. And at the first note of the hornpipe he would spring to his feet, and stamp and shuffle till the change of tune again made him totter and tumble to the ground.

Miss Chatfield made him rehearse his part, and having taught him how to hold his fiddle and bow, and how to break his English, and how to say *vater-land*, announced him ready for the campaign.

‘There is no harm in cheating those who are trying to cheat you,’ she said. ‘Besides, all’s fair in trade.’

‘Oh, yes, all’s fair in trade.’

As he said this he thought that Mrs. Appleton sighed.

He lay awake for a long time that night trying to guess who Miss Chatfield and Mrs. Appleton could possibly be. He did not think that they were real ladies. In the first place, he had met them in a place that was frequented only by the scum of the London streets: and besides that there was something about them very different from the young ladies who sometimes stopped him to ask him questions about his nests, in the Bayswater Road, or in Grosvenor Place. Miss Chatfield, it was true, had the voice and manners of a lady: but in those of Mrs. Appleton he had often detected a something which reminded him of the peasants among whom he had been bred. And yet it was extraordinary that they should always go out in the afternoon, which he knew was the fashionable time for ladies to go out, and dressed in rich clothes. They could not be bad women, argued the young rogue, because they always stayed at home in the evening, and though a great many visitors (whom he was never permitted to see) came after dark, he was shrewd enough to understand that these could not be lovers because his mistress always took off her fine feathers when she came home. He also observed that these mysterious visitors were never

shown up-stairs, but always into a room on the ground-floor, and that there Miss Chatfield came down to them.

Another singular thing was this : the room up-stairs looked out upon the back yard, as did the kitchen. He was always sent out by this back yard, which led through some mews into Regent Street, and told never to come to the front door ; but once, passing the house on his way home, he saw that there were shutters before all the windows, as if the house was uninhabited. And the ladies themselves always went out and came in by the back way, which although he was unacquainted with the manners of gentle-folk, appeared to him a very eccentric proceeding.

And how was it that they had gold and silver fish, and telescopes, and opera-glasses, and made-up violins ? and why did they always laugh when they spoke about the lumber-room ? and where was it, and what was it like ? He had been over Master Newell's lumber-room time after time, and he had never been able to pick up anything worth keeping there. It was full of disjointed furniture, and bits of mouldy matting and worn-out sacks,—that was all.

Next morning, at breakfast-time, he divested himself of various small secrets to which he attached no importance, in the hope of thawing Mary's more than housemaidenly reserve.

'I'm going to sell fiddles to-day, Mary,' said he; 'look at my clothes; they're what the Germans wear; and I'm to take one fiddle with me at a time, and pretend to be drunk, and then sell the fiddle for so much more than it's worth, accordin' to the thickness of the gentleman's head.

Won't that be fun? He! he! he!

'Rare fun,' said Mary.

'And mistress finds the fiddles, Mary.'

'Oh, she does!'

'Yes, she finds them; and, I say, she must be pretty well off, mistress must, to have so many things by her. Those telescopes weren't got for nothing, you know.'

'Oh, you think they wern't,' said Mary, dryly.

'No, that I'll be bound they wern't; nor the clothes she wears nother. But I say, Mary, what-ever makes her keep the shutters up?'

Mary rose from the table, and came round behind him.

'And, I say, what is missus? and what a funny lumber-room that must be? Have you ever been in it? Would you just ——'

'I'll just knock your head off,' said Mary, taking him a swinging spank on the side of his face, which immediately turned as red as the hand which struck it. 'You'll get it both sides of your ears, you young wretch you, if I catches you over any more of your insinivations. Why,

if our ladies only knew of it, after all their kindness to you, they'd turn you out of doors in a jiffy.'

George rubbed his smarting cheek, and held his tongue. But this physical rebuke had confirmed him in his suspicions that there was a mystery in the house, and he determined to discover it.

The end of the first day found him in good spirits; he had sold one violin for a sovereign. At the close of the second day he was in ecstasies: he had not only succeeded in getting rid of two of his spurious Cremonas, but had been accosted (luckily while fiddleless, for they were all fac-similes of each other) by his yesterday's purchaser, who told him what a fool he had been to part with a good violin at so dirty a price.

But, on the third day, he came home with his fiddle broken, and his face streaming with blood. To the questions which Miss Chatfield stirred up with Mrs. Appleton's tears and consolations, he replied that he had gone into a public-house near Leicester Square, and had offered his fiddle for sale, with a staggering step and a German accent, when a man, observing his dress, spoke to him in that language, and, receiving no answer, charged him with being an impostor, which he denied, asserting that he had been a long while in Eng-

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land, and that he was too drunk just then to recollect his own language. Upon this the man had snatched the fiddle out of his hands, had held it up to the light, had drawn the bow across the strings, and had finally broken it over his head and face, calling him ‘a *music duffer*,’ and threatening to give him in charge.

‘We must take the ups with the downs,’ said he, as they bandaged his head. ‘Things might have gone worse; he might have sent me to the station-house, or he might have come across me before I had sold a fiddle at all.’

‘I told you so!’ cried Miss Chatfield, exultingly: ‘he was worn down to nothing when we first saw him, but I could tell from his face that he had pluck at heart. What d’ye say, my brave boy? will you go out selling fiddles again to-morrow?’

‘Ay, to be sure; and the day after, if you like.’

‘No, no,’ said the old woman, anxiously.

‘Very well,’ said Miss Chatfield; ‘the day after to-morrow he shall go lace-selling and to-morrow we will keep him at home, and nurse him.’

‘On the evening of the next day she brought down a large tray from the lumber-room, filled with a quantity of ‘edgings,’ viz., the kinds of cheap lace used for the bordering of caps, etc.,

some braid and gimp, some lace articles—such as worked-collars and under-sleeves—and some lace of a superior quality, but English. This latter kind, she told him, was called *driz* by the street-sellers, and that he should offer it to ladies as rare and valuable lace, smuggled over from Mechlin, Brussels, or Valenciennes. The braid and gimp, she said, was very little in demand, and the whole street-trade in lace was now so indifferent that the only way a man could gain a fair profit on what he sold was by *palming*, i.e. giving short measure.

‘Would you like to learn how to do it?’ she asked; and, without waiting for his answer, she took a yard measure from a table behind, and grieved, in a loud street voice—

‘*Three yards a penny, edging!*’ Then she measured three yards with her wand, and showed him how she *palmed* the lace by catching it in short with a jerk of her fingers.

‘Let me try,’ said the boy, quickly; and in a couple of hours he *palmed* to a miracle.

‘Did not I tell you,’ she said, turning to Mrs. Appleton, ‘that those fingers would be a fortune to him?’

‘I suppose there won’t be any harm in my trying that on to-morrow, will there, ma’am?’

‘None in the least. One must do something of

the sort ; a fair profit isn't to be got at three yards a penny.'

On the morrow George patrolled the favourite '*pitches*' of the lace-business—viz., the Borough-market, Walworth Road, Tooley Street, and Dock-head, Bermondsey. He told his customers that he was a lace-maker from Nottingham, and that the '*edgings*' were his own and his old father's work. This tale, which he related with eloquence, and sometimes with tears, worked largely on the feelings of his auditory ; and while compassionate sailor-girls gazed tenderly on his handsome and grief-stricken features, his fingers stole lace from their pockets as his sobs had extracted sympathy from their hearts.

The next day he went to the houses in and about the Regent's Park, and towards Maida Hill. There he sold his *pseudo* Mechlin to the old dowagers, and his worked collars or '*edgings*' to their housemaids.

He felt a pleasure in cheating these dames, who, while trying to cheat government, were trying to cheat the whole of their fellow-countrymen—but a pang in clipping the measures of these pretty servant-girls, who gave him such bright smiles and words, and to whom pennies were so precious because they were so hardly earned.

However, he consoled his conscience with the Machiavellian maxim, 'All's fair in trade.'

It had become his motto, as it is the motto of those Jesuits of commerce, who say that all is fair which is foul, false, and thievish.

It was his panacea for the heart-qualm, as it is the panacea of God knows how many thousands in London, who rise and fast behind their counters every morning till they have stolen the price of their breakfasts.

To show you how slight is the step from fraud to felony, I will continue the history of this unhappy boy, who had fallen into the power of one who knew well how to harden a heart for crime.

CHAPTER VI.

FOOD FOR THE MIND.

IN George's little garret there was an empty book-case nailed against the wall. He had often wished that there were books in it, and had often thought of asking his mistress whether she could lend him any, for he had no doubt that there were some in that mysterious lumber-room which seemed to contain everything.

One night as he went up to bed at eight o'clock, his usual hour, he saw that it was full of books. He rushed at them, snatched down the first that came to hand, and having undressed himself with a rapidity known only to boys, sprang into bed, and plunged forthwith into the sea of black and white.

It was a volume of *The Lives of Highwaymen*, and, as he read the exploits of these lawless and daring men, he became motionless as a pointer,

except that his chest was heaving, and his eyes were flashing, and sometimes a cry of horror or delight would burst from between his lips.

He did not finish reading till the candle had died away into the socket ; and when he had laid his burning head upon the pillow, he found that he could not sleep. He lay thinking of what he had read, and watching the thin dusky light as it crept towards him across the room.

He rose at daybreak with his eyes red and watery, and his mouth parched. Slung his lace-tray over his shoulders, he went down stairs and into the streets, where he walked for hours with his eyes now drooped on the pavement, now raised towards the grey clouds of early dawn.

Two hours afterwards a woman stole into his room with a wolf-like step. When she saw that the candle had quite burned down, and that there was a book lying on the bed, she gave a horrible laugh, and clapped her hands.

An hour afterwards another woman entered the room. But when she saw the candle and the book, her wrinkled face grew tearful, and she sighed deeply.

Then she drew a little book from her bosom, and placed it on a table by the window, returning the other to the shelf.

When George came home to breakfast, Mary

asked him what it was that made him look so pale. His eight hours' work had never seemed so long and weary as they did that day. He walked about mechanically and sold little ; for in great towns customers have to be run after, almost inveigled. He was thinking of his book, and longing for the night to return.

He even took the precaution of buying a candle in case they gave him a short one to go to bed by. At tea-time Mary complained that she could not make him understand a word that she said. He told her that he was very tired, and went to-bed at half-past seven.

As he was undressing, his eyes fell upon the book which was lying upon the table. He determined to begin with that, and as it was such a small one, he thought that perhaps he might be able to read it through.

The first few lines showed him that it was a religious work. He glanced impatiently down the page, intending to throw it aside, when a word caught his eye. He turned the page, and read on.

It was a book which had been written by a good clergyman for the assistance of those who might be under some peculiar temptation, or on the threshold of some great crime. It was written in simple and beautiful language : it was

written with a heart as well as with a pen. Every word in that book was a good spirit which flew towards the poor soul tottering on the brink of the abyss, and which held it back with tender arms, and whispered to it to turn and be saved.

When he had read this book, the poor child sank into a calm, refreshing sleep, and awoke in the morning determined to be honest and industrious, and to think of thieving no more. But he was still too proud to pray : he relied upon his own heart, which he thought was so strong, but which yielded and broke beneath him like a wooden plank which had long been rotten and decayed.

He little knew how difficult it is to repent. Remorse is only to regret : repentance is to regret and to amend.

That very day he cheated a customer, and chose to believe that he had not done wrong. That very night he returned to *The Lives of the Highwaymen*, and felt relieved when he could not see his good book anywhere in the room.

The next morning as he went down stairs he heard female voices apparently in conflict. He stopped at the door and listened.

‘ I ask you again, what made you put that book there ?’

‘ I could not help it,’ murmured the voice of

Mrs. Appleton ; ' I can't tell ye how it is, but my heart kindles towards that boy. I feel as if I could look at him for ever : his voice puts me all of a tremble. There's something about him which makes me younger and sadder to think of. I don't want to tell ye what I mean—'

' You will perhaps have the goodness to answer my question. What made you put that book there ?'

' I tell ye, I tell ye, my heart warmed towards him, and I wanted to—to—'

' You wanted to balk me. After all the time and money I have spent my plans are to be spoiled by a foolish old woman who does not even know why she wishes to spoil them. Now, this time I consent to pass it over, but let me warn you to be careful for the future how you interfere with things or persons that I take an interest in.'

Without precisely understanding the meaning of this argument, George had heard enough to understand that Miss Chatfield would not be likely to oppose that in his heart which now like a rank weed had grown into a vicious and criminal ambition.

That evening he was called into the drawing-room, and she congratulated him upon his skill in *palming* 'edgings' upon the wives of Tooley

Street, and Marlow lace as Valenciennes upon the dowagers of Maida Hill. 'Do as I tell you,' she continued, 'and you will soon make money. I started in life as you are doing now, and you see that though I am very young I am not so badly off.'

In fact, to look at her face, one would have said that she was a girl who had just been released from the durance of the boarding-school. She was young in face, but in heart she was old as a hag who had lived years in crime.

She spoke of the books which he had been reading, and told him several stories about thieves with such eloquence that his cheeks flushed, and his blood boiled as he listened to her.

And the old woman glancing anxiously at him, trying to repress her sighs.

'Oh!' he cried, as she finished the story of Claude Duval, 'I would give the world to live a life like that.'

'You would be afraid of the prison, or the gallows.'

'Pooh! no worse to be in a prison than in the streets, so I've heard 'em say that have been there; and one may as well end one's life in the air as on a mattress.'

He caught the eye of old Mrs. Appleton as he spoke, and in her sorrowful beseeching look he saw that which made his last words falter.

The other woman saw it too, and her eyes gleamed like a snake's. But her voice was soft as she turned to George, and said :

‘ Would you like to go to the play, my boy ?’

‘ Oh, shouldn't I !’ he cried.

She smiled and went out of the room, taking Mrs. Appleton with her. She returned dressed in her bonnet and shawl, and they went out together into the streets, where to George's inconceivable awe, a cab was hailed and procured.

He sat diffidently on the extreme edge of the back seat, and surveyed the gorgeous interior of the vehicle from its ragged rug to its dingy roof, as a parson's daughter views for the first time the vaulted expanse, and the hollow sounding stones of Westminster Abbey.

After nearly an hour's ride the cab stopped, and the driver coming round to the door, informed them that they had arrived at the Roman Saloon.

They passed through the bar of a mammoth tavern, and thence into a garden *à la Cremorne*. In the centre was a large boarded platform ; the point of the centre was a stand for the musicians, who played in mid-air. The platform was girdled by a gravel-walk lined with trees bearing Chinese lanterns, and pavilions furnished with rustic seats and tables.

The platform was for dancing, the gravel-walk

for spectators, and the pavilions for oysters-and-stout, lobsters-and-salad, sandwiches-and-bitter-beer.

In a corner of the garden stood the Royal Roman Theatre. Its style of architecture was the flashy Corinthian—false, but pretty; modern, but picturesque. The ceiling of the lobby was painted blue with whitewash clouds, to represent the firmament. The pit and gallery were crammed with men in their shirt-sleeves, women in their holiday tempers, babies with shaven heads and sturdy lungs, and coster-boys overflowing with merriment and wit; while the atmosphere reeked with the mingled fragrance of orange-peel, stale ginger-beer, and corduroys.

As Miss Chatfield and George Messenger took their seats in a private box (1*s.* 6*d.*), the house was beginning to grow impatient and personal. Having discovered a gentleman in full dress in one of the boxes, a boy called out—

‘Three cheers for the cove in white kids!’

Which was heartily responded to, and assisted with cat-calls and hootings as they observed the discomfiture of the used-up Belgravian, who had wandered among these barbarians to receive amusement, not to contribute it.

This was followed by :—

‘Three cheers for the lady and the little bloke!’

‘ Now then, gov’nor, pull up that glazed calico.’

‘ Come, I say, where’s them cat-gut scrapers ? ’

‘ If we aint a-goin’ to have no actin’ to-night, play “ God save the Queen,” and let’s go home.’

A man then struck up ‘ Cheer Boys cheer,’ and all joined furiously and tunelessly in the chorus. Several persons in the pit put up umbrellas to protect themselves from the gallery, which sometimes rained ginger-beer dregs and orange-juice. The leader of the band at length made his appearance from beneath the stage, and just as his face filled the trap-door, which led into the orchestra, it was struck by a sucked orange, and the house laughed till it nearly cried.

Miss Chatfield bought a bill of the play for a penny, and to George’s delight, he saw that the play of *Jack Sheppard* was the grand performance of the night.

The first piece was one of those romantic melodramas which small play-wrights pillage from the French, a sin which is not visited upon the thief, but upon those who receive the stolen goods—with their ears.

Though George did not derive much pleasure from the weary polysyllables, and the heavy rant of the people on the stage, their spangled robes, the lights, the music, and the novelty of

the whole scene, were sufficient to amuse him during its hour of performance.

The tongues of the coster-boys had not been idle all this time; and while any good dramatic point was picked out with wonderful acumen, inefficiencies either in the acting or in the stage-management were treated most unmercifully.

Nor would they permit the play to proceed till they could get a good view of the stage. *Higher the blue* was shouted, when they found the sky too low, and *light up the moon* was the cry, when they observed that chaste orbit growing dim.

And when one side of a castle was left a-gap, an indignant chimney-sweep exclaimed — ‘Ve don’t expect no grammar here, but you *might* shove the scenes to.’

Between the Gallic melodrama and *Jack Shepard*, the bills advertised a comic song by the celebrated Bill * * * By this time the half-prices had come in, and the gallery presented an extraordinary sight—a vast black heap slanting to the roof, dotted with faces, and striped with shirt-sleeves. When there was a clapping of hands the whole mass twinkled as if these dingy hands were so many gleams of light. The rails in front were adorned with the bonnets of the ladies, who did for comfort that which in the

dress-circles of the West End theatres is done for fashion.

These bonnets became marks for the boys at the back, who seated upon the shoulders of their friends, or upon the spikes which crowned the partitions, played at pitch-and-toss with nutshells, &c.

Now greetings were exchanged between the gallery and the pit, and sometimes family secrets were revealed.

'Then you aint brought Sal after all, Bob my boby,' cried a voice from below.

'No,' answered Bob my boby. 'She wanted to stop at home 'cos she's a larning the pyanney.'

The comic singer, in a huge red cravat, and with an old blue umbrella beneath his arm, now made his entrée, and was received with loud shouts of applause.

As he finished his verse he looked to the gallery to help him out with the chorus, and gave them the time, saying, 'Now, gentlemen, the Hexeter Hall touch, if *you* please.'

The song was 'Duck-legged Dick,' and was vociferously 'angcored' by the greasy multitude, who were perhaps as anxious to hear their own voices as the singer's.

Then, as dandies from stalls or stage-boxes throw Covent-garden bouquets to their pet *dan-*

seuses, the more enthusiastic admirers of this Islington nightingale (principally females) threw half-pennies upon the stage, amid loud shouts of 'Chuck 'em on ! Chuck 'em on !' which the comedian carefully collected, and with obsequious bows vanished O. P.

After which the curtain rose, and the performance of *Jack Sheppard* commenced.

This play, which is now proscribed by the Lord Chamberlain, has been the means of corrupting many a young soul.

There ten thousand men and boys, each of whom had the germ of theft lurking in his heart, each of whom was tempted every day to steal, were witnessing a representation of the triumphs of one of their own class—a labourer—a successful thief, who robbed and was rich, who fought and conquered, who was imprisoned and escaped.

Ah ! crime and the penalties of crime are so different in the world and on the stage.

On the stage there is not the cankering remorse, the ever-trembling fear, the start at each voice which speaks, the shudder under each hand which is placed upon the shoulder.

On the stage the prison-walls are of wood and canvas, and the public will not permit hanging. On the stage then, the law has no terrors ; the judge with the black cap is a jest ; the condemned

cell a jovial Cider-cellar, the gallows an empty puppet for a Christmas pantomime.

As this play progressed, the whole theatre shook with enthusiasm and applause. And when their hero had safely escaped from his painted prison the shouts of exultation were deafening, and were repeated till the roof rang again.

In the corner of the box sat George Messenger. He was leaning forward, his body trembling with excitement. And near him sat the woman who had corrupted him, who had brought him there to destroy him, watching his face with a fiendish smile.

As the green curtain fell, he gave a gasp and rose from his seat. The temptress placed her hand upon his shoulder, and asked him if Jack Sheppard was not a great man.

And in the cab she poured evil words into his ears, and he listened to them greedily. He was ambitious in mind, he was dishonest in heart. He longed to be one who should be known and feared while alive, and who should be spoken of and written of years after he was dead.

When they were at home he missed Mrs. Appleton, and inquired after her.

'She has gone away,' said Miss Chatfield, frowning. 'I had set my mind upon something, and she was foolish enough to oppose me.'

Then she asked him if he was tired.

‘Tired!’ he said. ‘Do you think I shall be able to sleep to-night?’

‘Then go up-stairs,’ she said, ‘and put on the old smock-frock, and boots, and hat which you wore when I first saw you. You will find them lying on your bed. In those clothes you began life as a boy, and in those clothes you shall begin life as a man.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE STREET OF WOMEN.

WHEN George was ready, his mistress led him to the door. There was a cab waiting outside. But George remarked that the horse was strong and fiery, and that the driver wore no badge upon his coat.

They stepped in, and the man, without waiting for any instructions, drove at a brisk pace towards Charing Cross.

Down the Strand, which was still full of noise and light, and through the ponderous arch of Temple Bar into the City, grave, dark, and silent as it is by night alone.

Through Leadenhall Street and Aldgate, lighted only by the street-lamps and here and there by a faint gleam from the window of some cigar-shop or tavern, and they entered a street, so broad, so bustling that one would have fancied oneself in one of the great thoroughfares of the West End, were it not for the small size of the

houses and the squalid appearance of the inhabitants.

They had passed the boundary between wealth and poverty, between vice and crime. They were now in a new world, among a race of men who were governed by different customs, by different fashions, by different codes of morality from those of civilized London. They had crossed the frontier of the Aldgate pump, and had reached the land of costermongers and of thieves.

They were in Whitechapel.

It was Saturday night, and this street, broad as Piccadilly, presented an extraordinary sight. Butchers' stalls extended a considerable distance down the street. The pavement was lined with retailers of fried fish and potatoes, of fruit, of vegetables, and of a thousand miscellanea, their wares displayed to view by means of stout brown-paper candles, which, prepared in some peculiar manner, afforded an excellent light.

As George was watching this scene from the window with intense astonishment, the cab wheeled suddenly to the right, and dived into a labyrinth of dark streets in which nothing was to be seen, except a few shops full of rags and bones, and placards offering a farthing per pound for those commodities.

The cab stopped at the corner and the driver came round and opened the door.

‘This is near enough, I think,’ said he. ‘We’re close to Little Mint Street.’

‘Quite near enough,’ said Miss Chatfield, and springing out she walked down the street with the assurance of one who was well acquainted with the locality.

After a few minutes he heard a whistle and the rumbling of a train.

‘What railway’s that?’ said George.

‘The Blackwall; we shall go under it presently.’ And he saw her smile, by the light of a lamp.

They were soon beneath the arch of the railway, when, instead of passing through it, she turned and pointed to the right.

They were standing at the mouth of a narrow street, which was as black and repulsive as a cavern. It ran *under the railway* for some distance, the archway above being propped up by iron posts. Thus this street was always dark; it was a tomb: its inhabitants were buried alive; their only sun was the hot blaze of the engines which passed over their heads.

This odious place * was inhabited by nearly three hundred women, the most atrocious and criminal of their sex. Here they lived, a republic of demons, admitting only to their homes those men who were allied to them by the bonds of fellowship, in theft, in murder, or in lust.

* Frederick Street, Whitechapel.

Miss Chatfield explained this to her companion, and, taking him by the hand, led him into the street. As he entered the mouth of this infernal place, he felt as if he had placed his foot upon the brink of hell.

At the sound of strange steps, lights glimmered on all sides, and women poured from every door. It was a loathsome sight: most of them were clothed only in their shifts and shoes, some of them with under-petticoats round them; their faces were swollen with drink, and often covered with bruises and wounds.

They surrounded the boy as if they would have torn him to pieces. But Miss Chatfield interposed with the authority of a queen, and said a few words in a severe tone and in a language which George did not understand.

The rabble parted on one side, angry, but evidently awed.

They came to a small lane, branching out of the street under the railway. There were no lights in this lane, and no houses; there was a dead wall on each side. Charlotte Chatfield produced a bull's-eye from her pocket, and made the light precede her as she walked.

'We must be careful here,' she said, 'I am queen here, and sovereigns are always in danger from their subjects.'

The lane ended in a yard and in a tall dingy

house, which appeared as if it had not been inhabited for years.

Taking a stone from the ground she knocked three times against the door, and then, pausing for a moment, gave a single knock.

The door swung open; they entered. Another door was before them, a glass window above it. Miss Chatfield wetted her finger and rubbed it across this window in such a manner that it made a loud screeching noise.

A face appeared at this window, which was protected by huge iron bars.

‘Who is it?’ said a voice.

‘*On the fly,*’ she answered.

The door was opened and they went down some steps into a large room which was thus furnished :

There were two long tables running parallel from fire-place to fire-place and laid with greasy napkins, iron plates, chipped tea-cups filled with salt, two small stone jars filled with mustard, and knives and forks chained to the tables.

A number of candles in tin shades, nailed to the walls, lighted the room. These, being never snuffed, were appropriately infested with ‘thieves’ which streamed in large flakes upon the floor, the seats, and the backs of the guests.

One fire-place was black and empty, but the other blazed with an enormous fire, the temple of a blear-eyed, salamander-like, old woman, upon

whom were fixed in one long look of hunger and anxiety the eyes of twenty men and women, who were seated at the two tables, clad in disguises at once loathsome and appalling.

They raised a yell as a few minutes afterwards the tables were covered with joints and vegetables, served up on iron dishes thick with rust.

It was not long before they were all helped, and it was a strange sound to hear, the noisy clattering of the knives and forks upon the iron plates, and the tinkling of the chains.

'Are these them?' said the boy with a dash of disappointment in his tone.

'These!' said Charlotte, contemptuously. 'Oh no, these are cadgers.'

Tallow-face Sal, the waitress of the establishment, came towards them, flourishing a brown napkin.

'D'ye want to see the Screever? He's up in his room along with the cracksman and a lot more. Full o' bisness they are.'

They went up-stairs into a room on the first story, which was small, and almost filled with ragged men and women.

'What are they doing?' whispered George's escort.

'Making a cadger, said one of the men, touching his cap as he saw who it was that had spoken to him. Then he whispered to the man next to

her, who glanced at her and whispered to somebody else. And George heard them saying, 'That's Charley Chatfield, the Ryle Street blowen, the most famous she-fence in town.'

There was a man seated at a small table writing busily, with a heap of papers before him. He was short and thin, with a crouch in his shoulders and a rascal cast in his eyes. Close to the table, and rather in front of the crowd, stood a tall, pale boy in rags.

The girl told George that these were the Screever (literally, a writer of begging-letter petitions) and the cadger who was about to be initiated into the mysteries of the craft.

Lolling in an arm-chair behind the table, with a huge bit of bread and meat in one hand, a glass of gin-and-water in the other, and a short, black pipe in his mouth, was a burly ruffian with strength written in his brawny arms and broad shoulders, and prominent heaving chest; with villany in his deep hollow eyes, and his cropped black whiskers, and his eyebrows, which were half an inch asunder.'

This was the Cracksman, a famous burglar, and the pal of the Screever in all lays which the latter devised and the former accomplished.

'Now, young man,' said the Screever, looking up from his papers, 'you said you could read, I think?'

‘Yes, sir, my mother made me go every Tuesday and Thursday to a Sunday school.’

‘There! we don’t want to hear anything about your mother. Your friends say that you’re to try your luck cadgering in the country, where people’s green and food’s cheap. Take this paper, and chalk up on the post of every door you go to one of these marks according to the character of the people you meet with there. That will act as a clue to any brother-cadger that comes after you, as to what sort of treatment he is likely to expect. And when you see any marks you’ve only to look at this paper to understand them.’

On the paper was written :—

~ means Go on. It’s no use.

~+ means Stop and try your luck.

➤ on a corner-house or sign-post shows which way you have gone.

➤+ on a corner-house or sign-post means Go in that direction.

⊙ means Danger.

‘Here,’ he said, handing him another slip of paper, ‘is a recipe for the *scaldrum dodge*, which will teach you the art of burning your body with a mixture of acids and gunpowder, so as to suit the terrible accidents you have been in. You can say you were in a ship that was blown up in a battle, or that you ran into a house on fire to save a child that you heard screaming out of a garret window. And here’s another recipe for a

nice little mixture, which if you drink in the morning will make you look pale and green all day. I'll take five shillings for that job; and as you're in a way now to make 'a fortune for life you'd better stand a gallon of beer for these gents to christen you in.'

'Hear! Hear!' murmured the gents, approvingly.

'Now then,' said a man, swaggering up to the table, 'I've got a job for you, lawyer. How much d'ye charge for *screeving a brake*?'

'And, I say, Screever,' cried a woman, shuffling slipshod to the man's side, and tapping with her sharp, bony knuckles on the table, 'have yer any children by yer to let out, and clothes, and so on. I'm going on the monkry to-morrer, and I aint made up my mind whether it's to be the *clean family lurk*, or the *half-shallow*.

'These are my terms,' he answered, handing them each a slip of paper. On the man's was written:—

	s.	d.
Friendly letter	0	6
Long ditto	0	9
Petition	1	0
Ditto with "ream monekurs" (genuine signatures)	1	6
Ditto with "gammy" (forged) monekurs	2	6
Ditto very "heavy" (dangerous)	3	0
Manuscript for a broken down author	10	0
Part of a play for ditto	7	6

On the woman's was written :

	s.	d.
Loan of one child without grub	0	9
Two ditto	1	0
Ditto with grub and Godfrey's cordial ..	0	9
If out after twelve at night, for each child extra	0	2
For a school of children, say half-a-dozen ..	2	6
Loan of any garment per day	0	2
Going as a pal to vindicate any statement ..	1	0

'Let's have a petition, then,' said the man, laying down a shilling.

The Screever placed two ink-bottles before him : they were filled with ink of two different shades. Then he spread a bit of paper under his hand and began writing.

'He writes a —— good hand,' said one, looking with admiration at the pen which darted over the paper.

'I wish I could do it,' said another.

'If you could you'd damned soon be lagged,' chorussed the rest.

The Screever, having finished the paper, folded it in true official style, creased it as if it had been long written and often examined, attached the signatures of the ministers and churchwardens, and, dipping his fingers under the fireplace, smeared it with ashes, to the infinite delight of the rest, who swore that there wasn't one in twenty who wouldn't take it for a 'ream,' concern.

The man having folded this precious document in his *green king's-man*, or green silk pocket-

handkerchief, and placed it in his hat after the manner of the Persians, departed. The woman having made her arrangements and paid her money, left the room. A little more business was transacted in the same manner, and in half an hour Charlotte Chatfield and George Messenger were left alone with the Screever and the Cracksman.

‘Ah, Charley,’ said the Screever, familiarly, ‘who’d have thought to see you here? And what have you got there?’ he added, quickly, and darting his quick, furtive eyes at her companion. ‘In training for a cadger, eh?’

‘A cadger!’ roared the Cracksman, as he made the table quiver beneath his fist. ‘Yer never goin’ to make a boy with fingers like his a *cad—ger*! Why, Jem, Jem, I expect yer every day to tell me as yer tired of the old trade, and that yer’ll stick to screeving for a pack of ragged patterers all the rest of yer life. Yer a getting witiated, Jem: this half-bull letter work is corrupting yer mind, my boy.’

‘I’m not likely to give up a trade when there’s anything to be got by it,’ said the Screever. ‘And I’m not afraid of ending my days where you’d have gone long ago if you hadn’t had my head to lean upon, you pudding-pated fool.’

‘Instead of quarrelling,’ said Miss Chatfield, ‘listen to me. This boy here, George Messenger,

has stuff in him which will make him the wonder of the times. But of course he must be brought up regularly to the trade, and put through all the beginnings like any one else.'

'And who d'ye think of binding him over to?'

'There's a gentleman of the name of James Hanker,' said Miss Chatfield, coaxingly. 'He began life half shallow in the streets; from a shiverer he became a cadger; from a cadger he became a duffer (pedlar); from a duffer he became an area-sneak—a shop-bouncer—and a fogle-buzzer. From a fogle-buzzer he became a swell-mobbite, and then a rampsman, and then a cracksman. He has ascended from the very foot to the very summit of his honourable and scientific profession. And besides that he is up to all the other games of life that are worth learning. He has been a "shoful man," and a "smasher," and a race-course flat-catcher, and as famed a fence as Ikey Solomon, or Charley Chatfield the Swell Street (West End) Adam Tiler.'

'Yes,' said the cracksman, meditatively, 'there's no doubt that Jem's a great man, a very great man.'

The facial muscles of the light-fingered and light-moralled genius had not changed through the whole course of this adulatory harangue. When it was over, he said,

'I have no objection to take the boy in hand

for a few days. I'll *chant the play to him** and set him at dummy-work, and if I like him we can settle on terms, and I'll make a man of him.'

'Brayvo! brayvo!' roared the burglar, as he drained his glass.

'Thank you, Jem: and depend upon it you will not find your time thrown away, will he, George?'

'He'll find me learn a deal quicker than he learnt himself,' said George, coolly. 'I don't mean to mess many years over dolls, and them sort of rubbish, I can tell you.'

The men saluted these words of premature crime, with a hideous laugh, and Charlotte Chatfield laid her hand upon his shoulder.

He was lost.

'Come,' said Tom Randall, the Cracksman, 'let us go down stairs and baptize this young ben-cull in a bowl of punch.'

There was a woman crouched upon the cold damp stones leaning her head against the wooden railings of the area. She was glaring at the windows, which shone so brightly. She was sobbing and tearing the hair from her forehead, because she thought it was hanging before her eyes.

She crouched lower, and peered down, but could see nothing—nothing save an obscure waving mass, before which the damp on the panes and the tobacco smoke hung like a veil.

* Explain the tricks and technicalities of thieving.

Then she was silent, and kneeling down she pressed her ears between the railings. She heard obscene and blasphemous ribaldries, which were followed by shouts of coarse laughter.

Then there was a pause of silence.

Then low mysterious mutterings.

She clung closer to the railings, and shuddered.

A boy's voice, clear and melodious, rang from that den of infamy and crime, and soared like a lark's carol towards the sky. But ah! though the voice was beautiful, it was sullied by the words which it pronounced.

The woman heard the voice, and her whole face became light as the sun. But when she heard the words she turned pale as a corpse. And she moaned upon the pavement, and tore her grey hairs, while the tears poured down her cheeks.

'It is his voice,' she murmured; 'his voice singing a thief's song. Oh! why do I love him so? My love has already cost me much. It will make me cry many tears, and perhaps it will break my heart too; but I can't help it, I can't help it! My blood runs hot, when I see him: his face comes to me in dreams: his face—smiling and ruddy, and lovely as a young maid's: and then it turns white, and a grin comes over the lips, and it vanishes away. And sometimes it turns into the face of my poor husband as left me alone

with his baby, and went and died away at sea. And they took my baby from me, and drove me here to steal. . . . But why do I love this boy? He is naught to me, and I dare not see him again : I am in her power, and she has forbidden it : I must never, never see him again.'

Now the first streaks of dawn, yellow and ominous, appeared above the housetops.

And the creatures of vice were creeping back to their homes with pale cheeks and tottering steps.

And the creatures of labour were rising while it was yet dark ; rising after a short and meagre sleep ; rising cold and hungry, with woe on their foreheads, and despair within their hearts.

And the Great City was waking once more to its toils and its sorrows and its sins.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FARMER OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

I WILL sketch you the portrait of a farmer of the old school. Some day these men, with their landlords, the Saxon squires, will become extinct as the chaste and warlike Templars, as the high-souled Indian chiefs. And perhaps my grandchildren will read this book, as now we read a romance of the Crusades, or a hunting tale of the new world.

Do not despise farmers ; for while commerce is an intrigue, while painting, sculpture, and authorship are arts, farming is a deep inscrutable science of which our farmers have no more discovered the secret than the alchymists of yore succeeded in finding the Philosopher's Stone.

Do not laugh at farmers, for they are men who have worked hard and who have been ill-treated.

This nation once made it legal to have a free-trade in corn, and in corn alone. They ate bread

cheap, at the expense of the farmers, and not content with cheating them, they jeered them too.

‘ Ah !’ say free-traders, ‘ Bobby Peel was going to kill three farmers a week, but there’s one or two alive yet.’ Yes, for when that law was passed, the English yeomen, whom fools call idle grumblers, struck their broad breasts with their hands, and resolved to struggle hard against their foreign foes. It was a hard battle for them, this fight with farmers, whose land cost them little, and who had few taxes to pay. But they rose earlier and worked harder, these brave men, whom misfortune roused while cowards it quenched.

And as they were growing flag and faint, and were forced to fall back upon their hard-earned savings, THE CRIMEAN WAR began. And the cry was for meat to send out to the land of strife and famine. The nation which had bled the farmers had now to bleed for them, and to buy their sheep or oxen at a noble price.

Thus the Emperor of Russia saved half our farmers from ruin.

James Newell (before mentioned in these pages), proprietor of the Chalk Pits and Gravelly Shoot Farms, was as thorough a farmer of the old school as ever railed at railroads, mocked at Mechi, or growled at guano. He had been taught

by his father to whistle at the plough's tail, to bend his back over the corn at harvest time, and to eat his breakfast of *benjoltram*,* and his dinner of stale bread and fat bacon, under a hedge, like the rest of the farm-labourers. It was through this rigid apprenticeship to practical agriculture, and to his in-born habits of thrift and industry, that he became one of the most successful farmers in the county.

His father had had the fortune to rent land under the farmer's beau-ideal of a landlord—one *who lived as far off his tenant as a crow could fly in a day*—and who gave receipts for his rents, and paid for his repairs without making either visits or inquiries upon such trifling matters.

Ten years after old Newell's death this good man became involved in pecuniary difficulties, and the two farms were to be sold. The first bidder was James Newell, who threw down upon the mahogany two dirty wash-leather bags, each containing six thousand pounds. It was a fine bargain; for the land had been farmed well for thirty years, and was in first-rate order.

Upon this occasion the squire for once in his life said a shrewd thing: he asked Newell whether he hunted?

'No,' said Newell.

'Ah! thought not,' said the squire. 'Never

* Brown bread soaked in skimmed milk.

knew a fox-hunting tenant buy his landlord's farm yet !'

'You're right, sir ; my father had a long life, and laid by every penny he could wrap and wran. If a farmer wants to grow rich he must not keep blood-horses or lady-wives.'

True to these principles, he married the next week a farmer's daughter—one of the old-fashioned sort—an adept in the economics of the stables and the pig-sty, and a perfect genius among the milk-pails. Having given him a son and three daughters, she expired in the act of lifting a very large brewing-tub, which was out of its assigned place in the back kitchen.

Although his wife had perished a victim to her love for ne-plus-ultra housewifery, James Newell reared up his daughters in emulation of her life and death, and pursued with his son Thomas the same line of education which had proved so beneficial to himself—teaching him what it was to have a smock-frock, and sometimes a cudgel on his back.

And sometimes he would recite this old adage, in a kind of chant, beating time with his fingers on the kitchen dresser.

The man to the plough,
The wife to the cow,
The boy to the flail,
The girl to the pail,
And your rents will be netted.

But the man tally-ho !
 The wife piano,
 The boy Greek and Latin,
 The miss silk and satin,
 And you will soon be gazetted.

‘ When you grow up to be a man, Tommy,’ he would say to his son, ‘ you shall live in the big house, there, and farm Gravelly Shoot all to yourself. You stick to your trade like wax, my boy, and you’ll have a red face when you come to be an old man, and a sound liver, and a strong, jolly heart, ay, and your pockets full of yellow-boys, tew.’

When Tom was talked to like this, he would spit feverishly into the palms of his hands, and go to work with hoe, spade, or sickle, as if he were a young hero cutting himself a path to glory with his sword. His father’s words gave him thoughts which cheered him to his work far more than the black muddy beer which was sent out to them in stone or leather bottles ; and sometimes as he plodded home across the fallow fields, while the last red clouds in the west were fading into white, and while the dew was rising like a fog from the meadow grass, he would stop and fold his arms upon his breast, and, looking up at the sky, dream that he could see a farm-house, with a great straw-yard and massive barns, and countless herds of cattle.

But by daylight he gave himself no time for

reveries. Even at nooning, when the labourers were enjoying their dinners and siestas, his mind was full of business, and questions streamed forth from his lips as water from a bucket overthrown. And on Sundays as soon as he had bolted down his dinner he was off like a greyhound to some farm or other, to see Farmer So-and-so's famous fat hogs, or the foreign-looking cattle which some enterprising farmer had imported from the far North.

'Tom will make a great man,' said his father one day. 'He does his work like a free horse, and is always a-peerin' about to pick up wrinkles. His heart's in his call, and that's the head thing I look after. All we have to do, John Jones, my man, is to guard that he don't run to seed, and that he gits none of these here gallus new-fashioned notions about injins into his head.'

John Jones, the bailiff and temporary house-tenant of Gravelly Shoot Farm, chimed in with Master Newell in praising the young master, and in declaiming against all innovations. Then he said something about the lease being out, and that he should like to have it renewed for seven years.

To this, Master Newell gave a grunt, which the bailiff, a man of sanguine temperament, construed into an affirmative, and went his ways home rejoicing.

That night the farmer and his children were seated, after their nocturnal custom, in the great stone kitchen, making a ring before the fire.

The three girls were at needlework : Jane over a petticoat, Eliza hemming a pocket-handkerchief, and Annie, the youngest, darning a pair of worsted socks.

The son was mending the lash of a carter's whip. The father was seated in his arm-chair.

'Jane,' said he, 'go down to the cellar, and bring up a big jug of the October beer out of that little cask in the corner.'

The October beer, which was several years old, and of unrivalled strength and flavour, never saw throats except upon holiday occasions. However they knew that their father disliked to be questioned, so Jane, taking a bunch of keys from her work-basket, glided quickly from the room.

'Eliza, go up stairs to my room, and on the top shelf of the left-hand cupboard you will find a jar wi' some 'bacca in it, under a lead weight. Bring two or three screws of that, will 'ee?'

It was rare Latakia, which had been smuggled over from Turkey by the parson's son, a midshipman in the navy, and presented to the farmer in return for hospitalities. Eliza gave one stare of astonishment before she complied. They had never known the old man treat himself to the October ale and the Latakia tobacco on the same

evening; but she said nothing, and hastened on her errand, with a sigh.

‘Annie,’ he said, in a voice which began to tremble, ‘reach down from the shelf in the best parlour those six cut glasses which your poor mother used to set such store by, and bring ’em here.’

It was the first time he had spoken of using them since his wife’s death. Annie was only seventeen; she could restrain herself no longer.

‘The six cut glasses, father?’

‘Yes, the six cut glasses!’ roared the farmer. ‘What for d’ye want doddlin’ and starin’ like a stuck pig? I thought I spoke plain English, tew.’

The beer, the tobacco, and the glasses were brought into the kitchen, and placed upon the corner of the oak table at the farmer’s elbow.

He raised his head and seemed to be counting the glasses, for his eyes grew dim; he saw that there was one too many. Then he cleared his throat and said in a sharp loud voice:

‘Jane, fill five on them glasses.’

The glasses being filled, he held his own up in the air. His four children did the same. ‘I will give you a toast,’ said he. ‘*Here’s everybody in the world’s good health, except Farmer Jenkins of Nuthatch.*’

Each drank after him, repeating the toast,

which they remembered with the less difficulty as their father proposed it every Sunday at dinner between the meat and the pudding.

‘Why I don’t drink Farmer Jenkins’ good health,’ he explained, tranquilly, ‘is because I want Farmer Jenkins to die. He is a puddlin’ mean man, and tries to make his land as poor and thin as his cattle, and his cattle as poor and thin as himself.’

‘He’s what I call an apron-stringed farmer,’ said Thomas. ‘He was a grocer, and now he’s taken to farming. He’ll find it a poor catch, Is’e warrant.’

‘You don’t say much, Tom, but what you do say aint a great ways off the mark. He *will* find it a poor catch for all he tries to strip two skin’s off a cow, and would stoop any day to take a farthing off a dung-hill with his teeth. I dare say in the course of your Sunday travels you’ve heerd ’em tell that he who changes his trade often makes soup in a basket.’

‘If a man was bred and born a farmer, and could tackle hold of the right end of the stick, and make the quarters meet as should be, I don’t think as he’d want to change his trade.’

The old man gave a laugh of pleasure disguised in a cough, and glanced proudly at his son. Then he asked for his pipe, and having filled the bowl with the Turkish herb, dipped the

stem into the beer to sweeten the clayey morsel to his mouth. He leant back in his chair in an attitude of placid enjoyment. His eyes, though half closed, were still directed towards his son.

‘Tommy, my boy, what d’ye say to a pipe of this here bacca? it’s pretty good, considerin’ it’s growed by heathens.’

The girls screamed under their breath. Tom’s face turned red and white like a leg of mutton in its first revolutions before the fire. He could hardly believe his ears; it was very seldom his father allowed him a pipe of bird’s-eye or returns; shag he had not tasted more than three or four times; with cavendish he was only acquainted by name. And now he was asked to take a pipe of that glorious tobacco which his father himself considered almost too sacred to be smoked!

‘Reach him down a warden,’ said Newell. ‘Mind how you take it, Tom.’ Tom’s hand was shaking like a lump of pastrycook’s jelly.

Annie filled it for him, taking care to put in as much as she could. She lighted it, and presented the red-tipped stem to her brother’s mouth, which opened convulsively to receive it.

Nobody spoke for some time. The two human funnels were absorbed in a fragrant trance. The girls were dumb with astonishment, and on fire with curiosity. They burned to know why it was that the October beer had been drawn, and the

Latakia tobacco smoked, and the six cut glasses moved from their resting-place of years.

‘Thomas, how old are you?’

‘Twenty, last birthday,’ said Annie, feeling for her brother, whose senses were almost prostrated by the fumes of the tobacco and the generosity of his father.

‘Is your name Thomas, you silly wench? How hold are ye, Thomas, I say.’

‘Twenty-one, next birthday,’ replied the youth, showing off his age to the best advantage.

‘You are twenty years old, Tom, accordin’ to your reckoning, and accordin’ to mine you’ve been working for me truly and trustily these fourteen years. Now people have been crying out agen me, so I hear. They’ve bin saying I ought to have sent my boy to school to waste his time over Greek and Latin, and slates and pianos, instead of bringing him up to his call, a practical man as his father was afore him. Well, Tom, they’ve bin laughing at you, or pitying you, which comes to the same thing with most pipple, and now I’ll give you the chance to laugh at them. Gravelly Shoot farm-house is empty, or will be by the time old Jones is out; he’s bin with me a good while, but he must ‘jack-up’ now. It’ll want a little patching here and there. We’ll give you a fair start, Tom, with a sound roof over your head and a stout floor under your feet,

and arter that it'll be your bisness to see it's kept up to the mark.'

'How about the barns?' said Tom, whom surprise did not deter from looking to his interests. 'They want new roofs, floors, and everything a'most.'

'You shall have it as ye like it; fine deal floors—'

'I don't care so much for your fine deal floors, father, they're very good to dance on, and very pretty to look at for a short time; but heavy feet treads on 'em, and damp rots 'em, and rats burrow in 'em, and in a few years they crumble away like cakes of old ginger-bread.'

'You shall have them bricked: and how are the roofs to be?'

'A tiled roof for a barn isn't of no more account nor a bird-cage to keep out the snow, and slate isn't but of little better service. But with a thatched roof, if you let the old thatch bide, and put a waistcoat of new straw upon the coat of the old, it well wards off snow and rain.

'They shall have thatched roofs, that's sartin.'

'Then,' pursued Tom, 'to look at the question t'other way, you know thatch makes a place look frightful ontidy, and is sure to swarm with nasty things, and is likelier by half to catch a-fire than tiles or slates. What I should like, father, would be a tiled barn with plenty of straw shoved in

under the tiles and then ceiled, like this kitchen is.'

The farmer laid down his unfinished pipe, and stared at his son.

'Who told 'ee thart, Tom?'

'Common sense, father. If you wants to keep your body dry and warm, you puts it into a room with a ceiling to it; and you ought to do the same if you want to keep your bread dry and warm.'

'Tommy, you aint a boy no longer; I won't call 'ee a boy no longer. Give us your hand, my b—my man. Lor' bless us! you'll grow up too clever for a farmer, you will.'

Tom shook his head with the gravity and wisdom of a youthful Solomon.

'No,—one can't be too clever for a farmer. I haven't lived long in the world, but I've lived long enough to see that.'

'Right, Tom, right. The more a man larns at our trade, the better he finds out how little he really knows. And I've often thought that if God gave a man the grace to live for a thousand years, like Methuselem of old, he wouldn't be able even then to tackle the ins and outs of weathers and manures, and stock and markets, and all the rest of it.'

After reflecting a few minutes upon this profound sentiment, Newell continued:—

‘Very well, Tom, the house and out-houses shall be attended to which way you like best. And now we’d better think what kind of help-mate you’re to have at Gravelly Shoot. A farmer has no time to cook his own dinner, or to wash up plates, or to scrub floors. I’ll tell ’ee how it shall be. You shall take one of your sisters, I don’t care which, and she shall keep house for ’ee till you think of going into double-harness.’

Tom was placed in an embarrassing position. He loved all his sisters, and he was sure that two of them would like him less if he showed so decided a preference for a third.

‘You choose for me, father.’

‘No, no, son. You choose for yourself, then if you aint suited, you won’t have me to blame.’

Tom looked at their eyes.

In Jane’s eyes shone haughtiness and pride; they commanded him to take her because she was the eldest; but he saw no love there, and he passed on.

In those of Eliza roved an easy confident expression which seemed to say, ‘Of course you’ll take me, won’t you?’ He was shrewd enough to detect self-complacency as the acting ingredient in this look; still he liked it for its friendliness, and he thought that he would take Eliza.

But when his eyes met Annie’s he soon changed his mind. For in that tearful beseeching look

he learnt that she loved him, while the two others only loved themselves. She had been darning his socks, too, and he now remembered that whenever he had required any favours from feminine hands it was always Annie who bestowed them.

He went up to her and kissed her on the cheek. 'If Annie will come,' he said, 'I think she will make the best housekeeper to my fancy.'

She flung her arms round his neck and almost cried with joy.

'Before any of you go,' said the old man, with a gesture of his hand, as the two sisters rose, somewhat abruptly, 'I want to say a word or two more.'

They sat down, wondering.

'Most piddle, who have saved a little money, and bought a little land like to keep their children waiting for it till they die. And then folks wonder their aint more tears shed over burials. Now I'm going to act otherwise. See here.'

And he pulled out of his pocket four rolls of parchment. The first he handed to Tom.

'This,' said he, 'is a bit of paper giving you Gravelly Shoot Farm, as your own freehold. Besides which, I've put down five thousand pound to be paid over to 'ee, not when I die, but in ten years' time from this date, so that if you've had bad luck and want money it may act as a ward off agen the gruel-shop, otherwise called

the Dulton Union. Or if you've bin prudent and fortunate, it'll be like a reward to 'ee for working hard and keeping yourself the right-side uppermost.

'These papers, gells, give ye ten thousand pounds a-piece on your marriage day, or in ten years' time if you aint married by then. And I may as well tell 'ee all, that Chalk Pits Farm, and the little morsel o' money as I've kept now to go on with, and which may be smaller, or which may be larger on the day I die, will go to my poor wife's brother, who is now working himself brain and bone in a dark office in London City.

'Now I've told ye what I've done for ye, and what I mean doing for ye; and ye may tend your old father in sickness, and guard him in health without call to fear that in doin' good to him, you're doin' harm to yourselves. And now good-bye to ye all, my dear children, and God bless ye! God bless ye!'

* * * * *

Half an hour afterwards the sisters also retired. As soon as they were gone Tom rose and went into a kind of scullery which adjoined the kitchen.

Perched upon a settle was a beautiful girl about seventeen years old. A kerchief was folded gracefully upon her neck and shoulders: her long black hair was unloosed and fell nearly to her feet.

She was making a garland of yellow flowers and murmuring a song the while. Her voice was sweet, and as she sang one could see her teeth, which were white as pearls, and her round full bosom heaving voluptuously, and the colour mantling and falling on her cheeks.

When he came in, her face sparkled, and she let her flowers fall to the ground.

‘Oh Tom, I’ve been so naughty,’ she cried: ‘I’ve been listening to all the master’s been saying: I heard him send for the beer and the tobacco, and I grew so curious: and now I’ve grown so glad I don’t know what to do.’

‘It’s rare news, isn’t it, Nancy?’

‘Oh, it’s almost too good to be real: it’s quite dream-like. Fancy your living in that big house with Miss Annie, and farming Gravelly Shoot yourself! And then I can come and be your servant there instead of being here. Oh, how pleased I am! I’m gone ‘most crazy now, I do believe.’

Then she stared at his face, which had not brightened much at her proposal.

‘Wouldn’t you like to have me, Master Tom? Perhaps you think that I won’t work. Oh! you needn’t be afraid of that; I can do more work than most girls, as it is, and I would work like ten men if I was working for you.’

‘No, no, it’s not that,’ he said, reddening; ‘I’m not afraid of your bein’ idle, Nancy; but

you see I shall be there by myself like, and we're both young, you know, and people hereabouts do talk so.'

'A fig for all their talk,' said Nancy, contemptuously; 'their good word's no credit, and their ill word's no scandal.'

'Ah, but we must mind these things, my girl; I don't want your character to be hurt, nor mine neither; and I'm well assured that both would be if you were to work for me at Gravelly Shoot.'

'Doin' that can't hurt us,' she said; 'all the neighbourhood knows that we've been playmates and companions since we both were weaned. Don't you remember, Master Tom, how we played at cat's-cradle and titter-tatter (see-saw) when we were little. And don't you remember our goin' to the old well that night, and each of us wanting to fetch up that child as growed into such a young radical and run away. We've bin together at all hours and at all times, Master Tom; we've climbed the wild cherry-trees, and sought arter nuts and birds'-nests many and many a while together; we've worked side by side out "*fagging*" in the fields, and sat side by side on the soft green banks on the summer Sunday afternoons. I don't feel happy when I'm not wi' you; my heart don't beat right 'cept when your'n is by. And now you talk about neighbours, as if my heart keered for such things as

they. My heart lives for you, Master Tom, and if it loses you it'll break, Master Tom, it'll break, for it's so weak and silly.'

Her eyes filled with tears, and creeping towards him she embraced him tenderly with her brown but beautiful arms, and raised her red lips to his.

'It's no use, Nancy, it's no use,' he said, almost petulantly; 'my sisters have just bin on at me about it, and I promised 'em that I wouldn't ask father to let me have you at Gravelly Shoot Farm. The fust thing to look arter in this world, lass, is not to do wrong; the next thing to look arter is, not to let folks think that you're doin' wrong. It's wicked to steal turnips, and to plunder pippins, and it's foolish to stoop to lace your boots in a 'neep field, or to take off your cap in an apple orchard. And there's other people to be thought of beside ourselves. How d'ye think my poor little sister 'ud feel if there was some rank scandal about the house she was in a-goin' the rounds of the parish?'

The poor girl covered her face with her hands, and gave sobs which seemed to come from her heart.

'You be older than I, Master Tom, your heart be older than mine; I never knowed of such things as these.'

'Don't take on so, Nancy,' and he laid his

hand upon her shoulder ; ' I shall come over here on Sundays, and oftener, maybe.'

' Nay,' she said, in a low gentle voice, ' I must go from here when you are gone. I should miss you every moment of the day ; I should see your chair standing in the corner and always empty ; I should hear 'em talking about you, and touching the things you touched, and p'raps wishing for you home. No, I must go back to my father and mother, and larn to work with the men in the fields. Bisness, and bustle, and bad company, Master Tom, will make us forget for a while what it hurts us to remember ; but it's only for a while. Old memories, they say, come back all the sorer when they've once bin smothered.'

She took the flowers in her hands and tore them to pieces all but one. This she pressed against the lips of her sweetheart, and then three times against her own. She hid it in her bosom, and giving him a sad look she went out. She went out into the open air, and crossed a field till she came to a huge flat stone, the surface of which just appeared above the soil.

There was not a cloud in the sky ; the stars shone from horizon to horizon, and shed their drops of light in one glorious ocean of radiance upon the earth. High in the arch of the heavens was a thin silvery crescent. It was the first night of the new moon. Upon this night the

English peasant girls perform barbarous rites, the relics of another religion and another age.

Nancy knelt down on this stone with her bare knees. She loosed the bands of her hair, which fell nearly to her feet. She unpinned her kerchief, and then with bare arms, and bare breast, and dishevelled hair, stretched her hands towards the moon and chanted a strange rhyme to a strange tune seven times. After which she walked backwards to the house, her eyes still fixed upon the moon, and at each seventh step kneeling and bowing three times with her hands folded on her breast in the figure of a cross.

CHAPTER IX.

THE THIEVES' CHAPEL.

It was one of those hours of the night in which honest men sleep, and fools revel, and thieves work.

The vermin of society, like the vermin of the woods and fields, shun the light of heaven in which they can see God.

A man with his face muffled by a cloak was walking quickly through the courts and alleys which join Regent Street to Piccadilly. The last of these passages ended in some mews. There he stopped, and drawing himself under the wall looked round him till he saw a shadow upon the pavement, and heard a step quick, cautious, and cat-like as his own. He gave a low whistle, and as soon as it was responded to, advanced into the middle of the road : the other did the same ; they interchanged a few words, went down the yard, and thence into a narrow and deserted street.

They knocked in a peculiar manner at the door

of a house, apparently uninhabited, for the shutters were up before all the windows. They were instantly admitted by a maid-servant, who locked the door after them, bolted it at top and bottom, and finally secured it with a chain, which made it resemble the door of a prison.

‘Is she in?’ said one of the men in a harsh guttural voice.

‘You will find her in the little parlour, sir.’

The little parlour on the ground-floor of No. 3, Ryle Street, was furnished in a grotesque and original manner. The chairs were all unlike each other: the carpet would have suited a country dining-room, and the paper a summer boudoir; while a black oak bureau in one corner of the room frowned with all the sternness of antiquity upon a brand new walnut-wood cabinet in the other. The pictures, however, which disfigured the walls, were all of the same caste and talent, equally indifferent in morality and art. They exhibited these choice subjects in smudgy colours and black wooden frames. The progress of Jack Sheppard to the gibbet at Tyburn—the execution of Jonathan Wild—Turpin’s ride to York—Sawny Bean and his family feasting off human flesh in their cave—Corder murdering Maria Martin at the Red Barn—and James Greenacre cutting up the corpse of Hannah Brown.

They took off their capes and comforters and sat

down—the Screever taking a chair with the perpendicular back of the Elizabethan age—the Cracksman luxuriating in the soft depths of the latest patent spring.

‘You have managed to get here alive, then,’ said Charlotte Chatfield with a smile.

‘Yes,’ answered the Screever; ‘we came by different roads, and walked the quiet side of the streets.’

‘The Dandy’s not here yet?’ asked Randall.

‘No.’

‘No; of course not,’ said Hanker, sneering. ‘He’s dancing after some pretty face, and forgot all about our *chapel*, and all about the traps, too, perhaps. He’d follow a girl into a police-station if he fancied her.’

The young woman tapped the ground impatiently with her foot.

‘Yes,’ said the Cracksman; ‘consarnin’ women he’s as weak and wivver-wavvery as a cabman that’s lived on Haymarket gin.’

‘It’s his only fault, though,’ said the Screever. ‘Ah, Charley, that was a grand pick-up of yours. What wonders he’s done for us already! Why he knows more than any of us, and he’s little more than a lad now.’

‘How he did that last little bisness!’ cried the Cracksman, with the enthusiasm of a true connoisseur.

'Lor, Charley! if yer'd been there yer heart would have melted to see how he walked into thim safety-locks. Chubb's are minners to him, bless yer!'

'He's got the head of James Hanker,' said that individual, 'and the hands of Tom Randall, and the pluck of Old Nick himself, all in one. He's brought us in some "couters," too, since he has been mated with us.'

'He never keeps his own long,' said Randall: 'his blunt is blewed as soon as it is got. He's just as likely to go to No. 9, Fleet Market,* as to go to Newgate pretty well.'

'Hush!' said Charlotte. 'I hear his step; he has come in by the back way.'

A tall young man entered the room. His features were almost womanly in their grace and beauty, but there was an expression upon them which it would be impossible to define, and which seemed to emanate from his eyes, which were of a cold and bitter grey.

'Now to business, my pals,' he said in a clear sharp voice, every tone of which bespoke promptitude and decision. 'There's no doubt that after this little affair of the jeweller's, the blue bloodhounds will soon be after us.'

As he spoke he glanced at a magnificent gold watch, and fingered with some dandyism the dia-

* Fleet Street Prison.

mond pin in his gorgeous silken scarf. He was, indeed, very different from the ragged boy whom, but five years before, Charlotte Chatfield had picked up from the streets.

‘We shall be *chanted-in-the-leer* * to-morrow,’ said the Cracksman, in the brutal language of his craft. We must *speel-to-the-drum*,† captain.’

These men, old in crime, already recognized him as a master.

‘Yes,’ he replied, calmly; ‘we must make up our minds to go into the country, or to cross the herring-pond.’

‘You were bred in the country,’ said Hanker. ‘Are there any “plants” to be made there now-a-days?’

The Dandy crossed his legs in a symmetrical manner, and passed his hands through his hair.

‘In the country,’ said he, ‘dwell a race of men called *farmers*, who utterly disbelieve in banks, those nefarious institutions which have extinguished highway robbery, the high art of our profession, in order that they may pillage per centage from the million, and, by breaking now and then, utterly ruin the fatherless and the widows. But these farmers, who are noble-minded men, ride home from market at a particular season of the year, with a twelvemonth’s income in their

* Advertised in the papers.

† Go to the country.

pockets, which season is the autumn, now close at hand.

‘Are there no banks in the country, then?’

‘Plenty for gentlemen and tradesmen, and those exceptional farmers who prefer such custody to that of their own clumsy cudgels and rusty blunderbusses. However, they are all compelled to have large sums of money in their houses for the payment of their labourers on Saturday night.’

‘Hooray for the country!’ said the Cracksman. ‘If there are kens to crack, and heads to break on the Main Toby, we’re all there! What if we do get done for a Ramp, or end our days at Tuck-Up Fair, there’s no need to say die on a dung-hill, or talk without meat and drink; so Charley, my love, let’s have somethink that way, will yer?’

A round of cold beef and a bottle of gin were set before the hungry bandit, who cut himself huge fids, and listened to the conversation with rolling eyes and champing mouth.

‘If you were going to be scragged to-morrow,’ said Hanker, ‘you’d ask to die with your mouth full. But take care, Bob: he who eats much beef has more belly than brains, and that won’t fit in our trade, you know.’

‘Yes,’ said Miss Chatfield; ‘and blue ruin’s ruination, and a *flash of lightning** has struck many a man dead before now.’

* A glass of gin.

'We must go separate at first, my lads,' said the Dandy, 'and all in disguise. Charley here will find us whatever we want. If either of us should get boxed into the Jug, the others must help the canary-bird out of his cage, and cheat the beaks again. I will write down some notions I have upon this point, and you shall decide upon them afterwards. Bring me some pens and ink.'

While Randall was eating and the Dandy was writing, the Screever whistled a popular thieves' air in an under-tune, and Charlotte Chatfield remained apparently in deep thought, sometimes glancing furtively at her handsome *vis-à-vis*.

He handed the paper to his two confederates. The Cracksman frowned over it, not because he disapproved of the ideas, but because he found it difficult to decipher the words in which they were conveyed. Honest English was as unintelligible to him as the hieroglyphics of thieves would be to us.

Having mastered the preliminary obstacles, however, he testified his delight by knocking down a chair on each side of him with his fists, and handed it to the Screever, who, on reading it, appeared no less charmed with the contents.

Then they drew close together, and conversed for some time in a low and earnest voice. An hour afterwards the two men passed out. This

time each carried a large parcel under his arm, and each with a nod went his own way.

The grey-eyed young man was still seated in the parlour, inhaling the fragrance of a genuine trebucher. Charlotte Chatfield entered the room. She now wore a black silk dress, which displayed to advantage her hands and neck, white as Parian marble. She was very beautiful, but round her eyes and mouth there were lines and wrinkles unnaturally deepened by the life of anxiety which she had led.

A life of crime is always a life of care, for the hearts of the wicked tremble for the past, for the present, for the future.

‘George,’ she said, coming towards him.

‘Excuse me, I am no longer George Messenger. I am Augustus Dangerfield.’

‘I called you by your real name.’

‘My dear girl, there is nothing real in the existence of a thief; it is as ephemeral as those of butterflies and other poetical insects. I have changed my name as I have changed my language, my associations, my habits, and my honesty.’

Mr. Augustus Dangerfield took three or four long puffs at his cigar, which had been trying to go out under cover of his eloquence.

‘I will call you what you wish,’ she answered, gently, ‘if you will listen to what I am going to say.’

‘ Speak ; but I do not promise to listen.’

‘ You spoke of changing, George—for I still cling to the name by which I have known you for so long—and that very word has strengthened me in my determination. I have been a thief ever since I can remember ; and oh ! how bitterly I repent the crimes which others taught me to commit ! How sincerely I desire to atone for them by a life of virtue and repentance !’

She buried her face in her hands. Dangerfield took the cigar out of his mouth to smile.

‘ Would you hear my history ?’ she said, and she raised her beautiful eyes, which were now floating in tears. ‘ It will perhaps make you pity me. It was my own mother who taught me to steal, George ; who beat me when I returned without money ; who trained me to look upon the gallows without fear or horror, as other children are taught to look upon a happy death-bed and the peaceful grave. I was very quick and nimble, and soon made myself proficient in picking pockets, and counter-snatching. As soon as I found that I could steal a living, I ran away from that which I had called home, and went into the service of an old woman, who dressed me in fine clothes, and sent me to churches and theatres, where my lady-like looks enabled me to mingle with rich people without their suspecting that I was a thief, and to steal such numbers of

watches and bracelets that before I was seventeen I was almost as celebrated as Moll Cut-purse of old. By escaping from the clutches of the old Jewess, who thought that she had me as her slave for life, and by diligently saving my money, I was enabled after some time to rent this house, and to set up in business as a receiver of stolen goods. I also used to ply my trade of shop-lifting in the fashionable quarters, parading, as my duenna, that Mrs. Appleton whom you remember, and whom I had discovered in a Mint lodging-house playing hide-and-seek with the police about an attempted infanticide, or something of the kind. I do not know where she is now.'

'Ah!' said Dangerfield, dryly.

'Thus you see that few have had more experience in theft than myself, and few have had such success. I have never been in prison. I am rich; I have had nothing to discourage me. If it were possible for a thief to be happy, I should be happy. But I am not: I am miserable.'

'I, on the other hand, am a thief pursued by justice, who, fortunately for me, is blind in fact as well as fable, and you see I am very happy.'

'You are happy now because you are tasting triumph for the first time, but it will soon turn bitter in your mouth. You are happy now because you have earned the respect of villains; but the time will come when you will sigh for the

good will of honest men. Oh, George, let us turn before it is too late. We are both rich ; we have not the excuse of necessity for crime. Think, oh, think, before you endanger your life and liberty in this world, and your eternal happiness in the next.'

'What do you propose, then?'

She placed her white hands upon his shoulders, and her lips upon his cheek.

'Might we not marry, dear George? I should be so happy if you would make me your wife. Sometimes we would travel to France or Germany, and see all the grand sights of the world. And sometimes,' she added, in a voice hushed as a sigh, melodious as a song, 'we would retire to some secluded spot, and there dwell in delicious solitude.'

Her gliding step, her glittering eyes, her fragrant but fiery breath as she approached, made her resemble a serpent which uncoils itself to spring.

He shuddered in spite of himself. Then he rose, and exclaimed in a voice of thunder—

'*Marriage!* and you can say that word!'

'Ah!' she cried. And she clenched her hands, and recoiled a few steps.

'You have told me your history,' he said, recovering his sang-froid, and lighting a fresh cigar at the dying ashes of the first. 'Permit me

to relate to you the history of another young lady ; you will find it very interesting indeed ; so romantic that it almost borders on the incredible ; so instructive that it becomes an actual warning to all who might by chance become acquainted with its heroine. Her name was Jane Williamson.'

The woman uttered a horrible cry. Dangerfield closed his eyes, and allowed the smoke to curl voluptuously from between his lips.

' Her name was Jane Williamson. She was the daughter of a farmer. A gentleman from London saw her, and was struck with her beauty. He feared to marry her, for he was old, and she was very young. But she told him with embraces that she loved him ; he was vain, and he believed her. He believed those embraces to be pure, which were meretricious as those of a *fille-de-joie*. He married her, and before two months had passed he found that she had a lover. He forgave her as they say God forgives the sinner who prays to Him for mercy. In return, this angelic creature robbed him of every farthing he possessed, and eloped with her lover.'

' I was his tool : I was at his mercy : he made me do it !' she cried.

' Liar and murderess ! That man, your partner in vice, your accomplice in crime, was discovered lying in the high-road, his face covered with

frightful spots, and all the signs of death by poisoning within his frame. Therefore, my dear Charley, since I have no ambition to play Duncan to your Lady Macbeth, or to have my tea sugared with arsenic any morning that you happened to sit down to breakfast in a bad temper, I politely decline your kind offer.'

She looked at him calmly, gave a low moan, and fell like a corpse upon the floor.

He surveyed her with the inquisitive look of a prize-fighter who wishes to see what effect his 'punishment' has had upon his adversary—a look in which sympathy is the least ingredient.

'Well,' he said slowly, 'this appears genuine, and I suppose must be attended to.'

He knelt down by her, and forcing the mouth of the gin-bottle between her teeth, made her swallow a few drops. This seemed to revive her.

I write *seemed*, for Charlotte Chatfield had only pretended to faint, in order that she might gain time to think. She had been studying a part while she had been lying prostrate on the ground. Now she began to play it.

She raised herself feebly, and gave him her hand.

'You have found me out, Dangerfield, and further deception would be useless. To carry out my ambitious projects I wished to try a new field

abroad, and to have with me a husband of gentlemanly appearance and of great ability. But I find that it is not so easy to dupe you now as it was five years ago. There is no occasion for us to quarrel: let us both forget this interview, and let only the relations of thief and thief exist between us.'

He looked at her eyes. They met his calmly and unflinchingly.

'Bah!' said he, taking her hand, 'you are a sensible woman, Charley. As you suggest, we will drop matrimony for the future, and stick to business.'

'It shall be my business to destroy you,' she hissed to herself.

And when she was alone, she took a terrible oath.

CHAPTER X.

THE REJECTED ONE.

AT the time when my story unfolds its leaves to the sunbeams of your eyes, O handsome and intelligent reader ! James Newell was dead, Jane and Eliza gone to Bath to pick up husbands, Chalk Pit's Farm let to a Somerset farmer, and Annie still a spinster, and still keeping house for her brother Tom ; who by this time had gained a reputation among his servants as the best master that ever sent out beer on a hot day, and among his peers and superiors as one of the likeliest young fellows that ever handled a cricket-bat on a summer's evening, or gave a view-halloo by the cover-side.

Gravelly Shoot Farm was as clean as a pink inside and out. The house was a substantial affair, as red and ugly as the British uniform, relieved at the corners with white stone facings. The barns and stables and cart-houses were all

tilled, and the barns were ceiled within. Young ladies with huge portfolios turned from them in disgust. Tourists who walked the skin off their feet to enjoy the picturesque shuddered at the sight of these crimson roofs, and passed quickly on. And the farmers of the old school with their huge neckcloths, and tailed coats, and low black-ribboned shoes, would look and go laughing at the idea of a barn being built inside like a parlour.

But Tom, whose grain was always in good order, could defy these cynics as he defied the weather.

One evening as brother and sister were at supper together after a hard and happy day's work, it struck Tom almost for the first time that Annie was a very pretty girl.

'I wonder how it is nobody comes courting,' he thought. 'But there, perhaps they do. I'll just wait and see!'

He was a sociable young dog, and very few evenings passed in which some neighbour did not drop in to take a pipe, a glass of grog, or a hand at short whist. After a little observation he discovered that the one who came oftenest and stopped longest was Mr. William Sampson, eldest son to Timothy Sampson, of Ruddell's Farm. After a little more observation he discovered that when he rose to go out of the room (in a

party of three) they would glance askant at each other, and smile with averted faces.

He was very glad of this, for William was not only his best friend but his living counterpart. They were both about the same age; their fathers had brought them up in the same manner. Their respective sample-bags, sheep, and teams were patterns of each other. They capped each other's stories and chorussed each other's songs, and argued till all was blue, and drank each other under the table, till they had earned the cognomen of *the two kings of the market-room*.

Then they played at quoits or skittles at the two farms, and single-wicket matches on the village-green, and trolled for jack in the same water, and sculled each other for barrels of best ale, and rode neck and neck at the double fences in the hunting-field, and wiped each other's eyes at old birds in November.

'The Sampsons and the Newells were made to run in pairs,' said he to himself. 'Bill and Annie will go together as nat'ral as half-and-half.'

So he gave the lovers every possible encouragement, perpetually asking Bill to come over and do grog and cigars, and perpetually finding excuses for putting on his thick boots to go out into the yard.

By-and-by it came to be rumoured among the

old women who gossipped over their brown-sugared tea, and among the farmers and dealers in 'Change' on market-day, and among the servant girls in their Sunday strolls, that young William Sampson of Ruddell's was keeping company with Miss Newell of Gravelly Shoot.

As soon as this fact was established, Gravelly Shoot became the focus of twenty radiating hearts. These intelligent agriculturists could only discover that Annie Newell was a catch both for wealth and beauty by the time that a good-looking and (for a farmer) a passably talkative young man had got footing ahead of them.

On Sunday evenings Gravelly Shoot was like a fair, and the consumption of spirits and tobacco would have shed honour upon an assemblage of medical students. But even gin-and-water did not embolden these visitors to make more than sheep's eyes at the fairy who had drawn them there. These silent tributes flattered her vanity without putting her to the trouble of paining theirs. She had however one suitor who was really unfortunate. This was no other than the sole object of her late father's antipathy—Mr. Jenkins of Nuthatch.

'I hate the man,' said Tom, 'but one can't shut the door in his face. Of course you don't want to marry him,—a fellow with a set of cows

not worth opening and shutting a gate after. Why, you might hang your hat on their hip-bones. *He* a farmer! A pretty notion he has of farming! He let his plough stand to kill a mouse; and instead of dunging twelve cart-loads to the acre, as everybody else, he don't dung twelve wheelbarrowfuls. And his horses too! He thinks it's a saving to starve 'em, till they're got as weak as chickens, and can't do any work. Why, you can see 'em reel as they go up the road.'

'He has a very nice house,' said Annie, demurely.

'It's a Mock-Beggar Hall: fine outside, but nationally barren within. There aint much more than carp-pie for his wife in the larder, I'll be bound for it. He aint the sort to keep more cats in his house than will kill mice.'

'He has a very pretty sister,' said the little minx, her eyes twinkling.

Tom burst into a scornful laugh.

'And as wretched and ignorant a little nat'ral as you could find in a ten days' tramping. Ho! ho! ho! Did I ever tell 'ee? I was riding by the house one day, when out she came with her back-hair flying loose, and crying fit to split herself. Dear, dear! thought I, brother's bin took with a fit of remorse and killed hisself. "Oh, Mr. Newell!" she cried, "oh Mr. Newell! what shall

I do? My poor duck is so ill; she's got fast on her nest and I can't move it off." Ho! ho! ho! that was a larfable ditty.'

'But if she hadn't been brought up to farming—'

'That's not it, girl. She's mean and close-fisted, like her brother. Do you know what she did?—She watered the men's beer when she sent it out to 'em in the hay-harvest. Why, if you put just one drop of water into beer, it's spoilt directly. It's so different from spirits. She ought to have been made to drink it, the gallus . . . but here, as I'm alive, comes the man himself. I say, Annie, now to please me, *can't* ye manage to chuck him off somehow? I *can't* send him away, you know, and it gives me the sick every time I see him.'

She answered him with a cunning little smile.

Farmers' daughters are not lusty, broad-shouldered wenches, with big red arms and necks like bulls, as some of you probably suppose. Nor are they the unsophisticated creatures, green as their own meadow grass, soft as their own butter, the stereotyped guileless victims of stereotyped wicked squires, as writers of rural tales would have you believe. They can display as much finesse in their best parlours as any peeress in her gilded drawing-room; and although they might be at a loss to understand the intricate compliments of a

Belgravian roué, they can play their plebeian gudgeons with as light a hand as ever tortured a titled trout in a West End mansion.

In describing Annie Newell, I present to you a fair specimen of the class. She was long-haired, and blue-eyed, with a very white skin. Her hands and forearms were a little red and rough from manual labour, but her neck and forehead were like polished ivory. Her eyes were mild and candid, and could be roguish when they pleased. Her hair was chestnut, and instead of being tortured into ringlets, as is the fashion among farmers' daughters, who consider it genteel, was disposed into an abundance of wavy curls, which suited her Sunday dress and Sunday admirers to a T (ittle).

Mr. Jenkins found her alone in the parlour, sewing. He stammered a good morning, and sat down clumsily upon a chair.

Jenkins, the miser farmer, as he was called, was a tall, meagre-looking man, with bright red hair. He carried *pinch-and-starve* in broad letters upon his features, which were angular, and also upon his clothes, which were patched and thread-bare.

'Are you not well, sir?' inquired Annie, with an appearance of interest, as she saw her visitor shifting about on his seat as uneasily as if it had been the top of the kitchen oven.

‘Quite well, thank you. The fact is, I—I—I came over to——’ Full stop.

She saw that she must entice the worm from its hole to be trod upon.

‘You have some dust upon your coat,’ she said. And she patted him on the shoulder, under pretext of dusting it.

This made her lover blush from the nape of his neck to the tip of his long ungainly nose, till his face was almost as red as his hair.

And emboldened him to seize that hand and to cry :

‘Oh, Miss Newell, you make me very happy : will you consent to make me happier still?’

‘How can I make you happier?’ said the deceitful puss.

‘By becoming the wife of my bosom, and the mistress of Nuthatch Farm.’

Mr. Jenkins appended a huge sigh to this request. It might have been a gasp of relief : it might have proceeded from some tenderer emotion.

‘But your sister is the mistress of Nuthatch Farm now, and perhaps she might not like to part with the keys.’

‘She shall leave the house directly you come into it, I assure you. She can go back to her mother, who lives in London.’

‘But I have such a prodigious appetite ; I

should eat you out of house and home. And folks say you don't often light the kitchen fire at Nuthatch. Now, I couldn't bear the idea of being starved—ugh !'

'You shall have everything you wish, my dear Miss Newell,' cried her red-haired supplicant, with a sudden impulse of prospective generosity. 'You shall go shopping yourself, and marketing yourself, just whenever you please.'

'I fear, sir, that I should not be stewardly enough for your wife, and that you would be too stewardly for my husband. Were it in my power to give you my hand, I tell you candidly, Mr. Jenkins, that it never would be yours. When I marry, I marry a man, not a savings-box—a man who spends his money and does good with it, and who does not keep it piled up in a heap till it decays—a man who thinks it neither sinful nor extravagant to enjoy a few innocent pleasures, and who would give me a good dinner, and eat one himself every day of the year.'

'Then I'm to understand, madam——'

'That I am engaged to Mr. William Sampson.'

'Why couldn't you say so at first, without all this cursed preaching.'

'Your hat, Mr. Jenkins.'

'When you've spent all your money come and borrow some of me. You shall have it—70 per cent.'

‘Your stick, Mr. Jenkins.’

‘Damn the stick! Let it stay where it is: it’ll do for your husband to lay across your back when you’ve made a fool of him. Good-bye, madam. But keep the stick.’

‘I will keep the stick, and give William your message,’ answered Annie gravely.

Jenkins burst out of the room, and went home, snapping like a mad dog at everything he met.

Annie took the stick in her hand and looked at it curiously. It was a tough bit of young ground ash, not too thick, and profusely adorned with rough little knots all the way up and down.

She took it into her bed-room, and locked it up in her closet.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO KINGS OF THE MARKET ROOM.

It was Saturday morning, when autumn was in the bud, and the leaves in the fall; when the flowers were dying, and the fruits were decaying, and the summer birds had ceased to sing.

But the sun was still bright and warm, and the sky still of a deep dark hue; and the swallows who live in the sun, as lovers live in the smiles of their mistresses, had not yet flown to their winter homes.

From a light sleep with a light heart, Tom Newell awoke and sprang out of bed, thus 'wiping the eye' of the drowsy sun, who still slumbered beneath the blankets of the eastern clouds. But soon these clouds turned purple, as the monarch with a red and flaming face rose grandly above the hem of the earth, the waters, and the sky.

Tom put on his thick farming boots, and gartered his corduroys below the knee with pieces of

.

string to keep them ankle-high from the dirt, and danced a hornpipe on the landing, which was his way of awakening the household. Then he unbarred the kitchen door himself, and strode out into the fields, where already the ploughs had begun to creak their way across the stubble.

Along the dark-brown ridges which the ploughs had raised, and following close upon the carter's heels, a flock of sparrows, chaffinches, and rooks were screaming and ca-aing as they gobbled down their earthy prey, and drove their beaks anew into the emollient soil.

When he had seen all his men fairly to work, and given them a few instructions, he found it time to return home, which he did with a wolfish appetite, and with the feelings of a man who has begun his day well, and who intends to continue as he has begun.

When he had got into the parlour it was not long before his sister had thrown her arms round him, given him a kiss, and squeezed him down into his arm-chair before a steak tender as her own heart.

'What a thing it is to have a sister,' said Tom, reflectively, with his mouth full. 'There. I shan't have one long now; that ere Bill's goin' to run away with 'ee. Ah! well ye may blush at the thought of leaving me here all alone. Whatever I shall do, I don't know.'

‘Why don’t you think of marrying yourself, Tom?’

Well, I don’t like the idea of getting entangled, somehow. They say a good bone doesn’t always come to a good dog, and perhaps a good rib wouldn’t fall to the luck of a jolly young dog like me.’

‘You are so hard to please. There’s nobody—’

‘Stop!’ cried Tom, ‘I have it. You know, Annie, you being a goose that can baste itself, you’ll bring Bill ten thousand pounds; and from what I can learn, his father will give him about as much more. With that money he means rentin’ a farm, and as soon as he’s got the farm he means putting up the banns, not afore; of course it is no use having a pig before ye’ve got a sty. Well now, why can’t ye come and live with me? ye’ll have to live here some day; I’ve put that square in my will, and ye may as well come now as then. What d’ye say to it?’

‘Oh, that is a capital plan!’ she said, clapping her hands; ‘and we can rent Chalk Pits Farm just as we talked of doing, and let the house instead of living in it ourselves. But, Tommy, don’t talk about your will and that; it makes me sad to—to think of that for a moment. I love William very much, but I feel as if I should lose all if you were to go; and do you know, I

am a little superstitious just now ; I have a presentiment—'

'Where's my Sunday boots and gaiters, Annie? It's time I was off to market. Hy, Jem! saddle my mare—the new saddle, mind. Lord bless ye, my child, I never put no faith in 'zentiments, as you call 'em. Why, it was only last November Jack Cox, the carter, came up to me looking as frightened as a cow that had lost her calf. "O measter," said he, "doant 'ee go a huntin' to-day, I knows somethink 'ull happen to 'ee, I knows a will." Well, sis, I was a little turned over at this, for I had read about sich things in books, and if I hadn't known the lad to be as soft as a boiled turnep I might ha' turned back. However, I went on, and made very careful work of it over the first fence or two, till my blood got warm, and then I forgot all about it, and came in at the death, as a farmer on a blood mare generally does. And the first thing as I seed comin' home was this Jack Cox, who'd walked three mile to meet me, and darned if he wasn't near crazy with delight, and chucked his cap up in the air, and went on laughing and gambelling as if he'd lost his mind. So since then I've put no faith nor confidence in 'zentiments at all.'

'But you will be very careful, Tom, won't you? I cannot help fearing that something will happen to you on the Red Hill! do ride down it

slowly, dear love, it is so very steep and dangerous. Ah! but I shall not let you go till you have promised me!

‘Good-bye, Annie, and I hope I’ll sell the wheat. Where are the bags, my grey linnet? If I go to market without them it would be like going out shooting without a gun. If we’re in luck, Annie, I’ll bring back these bags full of yellow sovereigns instead of yellow corn-grains. Feel ’em, my chuck; aint they hard? Bite ’em, my blossom; aint they sweet and juicy? They’re prime quality, and they’ll fetch a prime price!’

His mind was full of wheat and the bargains he was going to make.

And hers was full of love, and fear, and sadness.

He had to ride past the parlour window. It was open, and he saw his sister leaning out of it.

‘I’ll talk to Bill about that bisness,’ he said, ‘and I’ll be back pretty early, as you’re so timer-some to-day.’

When he had ridden past, light and agile as a young fawn she sprang through the window, and running into the middle of the road, looked after him with tender, lingering eyes.

When tears started into them she tried to smile at her own folly, and brushed them hastily away.

‘I will work very hard to-day,’ she said to herself, ‘and then the time will soon slip by. It is only twelve hours after all. He will be back by nine.’

* * * * *

A country town is only awake once a week, and that is on the market-day. At other times houses may be open, shops may be open, and eyes may be open; but houses, shops, and people are fast asleep. The houses resemble mausoleums, the shops are cold and still as pictures, and the citizens who walk about do not seem to know where they are going, what they are doing, or why they are out of doors.

But on market-days everybody and everything is alive. The tradesman no longer props his front-door and yawns down the empty streets; he is behind his counter, bowing and skipping like a French dancing-master. His shop is not filled with impatient customers like a shop in London on Saturday night, but with patient customers like a shop in the country on Saturday morning; for the good old housewives only go shopping once a week, and consider it too serious and sacred a business to be lightly hurried over.

Every thing is full. The inns fill the farmers, as the farmers fill the inns. The yards are full of carts; the stables full of horses; heads are full of

business ; hands full of wares ; hearts full of hope, or joy, or discontent.

The streets are filled with—

1. The ragged idlers indigenous to the town and its vicinity.

2. Market-women, who erect tempting barricades with donkey-carts, and hen-coops, and fruit-baskets towering towards heaven.

3. Clumsy cubs of peasant farmers, with felt hats, fustian frocks, plush waistcoats, brown leather breeches, sky-blue stockings, and great greasy shoes big as wheelbarrows.

4. The homespun specimens of agriculture, who shone years ago in Mr. Morton's comedies, with grey hairs, red faces, top-boots, heavy riding-whips, and sentimental hearts—for all but their day-labourers.

5. A set of roystering blades, who drive dog-carts as high as Haman's ladder, and steeds strong and fiery as the coursers of Phæton ; who wear smart green frocks, fancy waistcoats, jockey boots, peach-blossom corduroy breeches, and hats lodged jauntily on the left ear ; who, once settled in the market-room of their favourite tavern, drink like fishes, smoke like lime-kilns, and sit like hens, and who display their sample-bags in the corn-market with all the grace of a Rothschild who negotiates a loan upon 'Change.

Tom rode into the little town of Dulton, which

just then exhibited, in the individual, one of those scenes which I have just described in the gross.

As he turned his horse down the Bull Yard, a tall broad-shouldered young man came out of the coffee-room, and with a nod and smile, followed him towards the stables, and shook hands with him as he alighted.

‘Ah Bill! you’re come to blow my nose with your wheat, I suppose?’

‘The boot’s on the other leg, I expect, Tom. However, if I don’t blow it, there’s nobody else here that’ll touch you. We shall have it our own way with the dealers and millers this time, I think.’

They walked arm in arm towards the Corn Exchange, stopping to shake hands and exchange good-mornings once or twice in every five yards.

The Corn Exchange was a large stone hall, furnished with a circle of desks, the rented property of the business men who went regularly there, and who used them for writing their cheques upon, as their business ancestors had formerly written upon a hunchback, who, in the reign of Charles II., mingled among the merchants with paper, pen, and ink, fastened to his side, and who, when required, from cripple, would become writing-desk.

Each having paid a fourpenny piece, the price of admission, and entered the Exchange, was but-

ton-holed, Thomas by a dealer from town, and William by a celebrated country miller, who knew them of old. Each, after half-an-hour's haggling, obtained the price they had asked for at first; after which they all adjourned to the nearest inn to drink *the bargain cup*, a practice which has been handed down from the ancient Normans.

Then they went to the Bull to dine at the ordinary.

The system of etiquette observed at these ordinaries is somewhat peculiar. The carver does not fulfil his duty if he invites a gentleman, who declines a cut from his joint, less than three times whether he will not change his mind—a custom equivalent to that in good society, of asking one's guest to take twice of soup. On the other hand, it is considered a breach of good manners if that gentleman does not assign some positive reason for so declining; as for instance: 'Thank'ee, sir, I had some beef this morning, and I'll take a shy at the mutton now, if you'll allow me;' or, 'I'm much obleeged to you, sir, but I dursn't take weal now: I finds it so ondisgustible; it turns unkid on my stomick like.'

Those that assent, never reply, 'Yes, if you please,' or 'Thank you, I will;' these they deem curt and abrupt forms of speech; but always, 'Thank you, sir, presently;' or 'With great pleasure, Mr. Giles, when you're at leisure.'

When the meat and cheese had been cleared away a bundle of long clay pipes which they called 'church-wardens,' a plateful of tobacco, and two bundles of 'spills,' were deposited upon the table.

'Any orders, gentlemen?' said the waiter; and forthwith he was instructed to bring ten *three* of brandy with cold water, five of warm Scotch, and one bottle of port, for which the dandies had clubbed together.

After a little while the conversation turned, as it nearly always does, sooner or later, in bucolic assemblies, upon Mr. Alderman Mechi. While two or three present, who happened to know him personally, spoke loudly in praise of his personal qualities, there were few who did not revile the system of his drainage, the character of his livestock, and the veracity of his balance-sheet.

The bile of English yeomen has been raised by the idea of a city merchant undertaking to teach them farming. This bile has brought on an inflammation of the eyes, which effectually blinds them to the nerve of a man who could write a treatise on agriculture while sickness confined him to his bed, and to the wonderful advantages which they will derive from the experiences of so rich and spirited an experimentalist.

The after-dinner council being dissolved, the two kings of the market room, with their band of

courtiers, ascended to a room on the second floor, where they played at sixpenny and threepenny *pool* at a billiard-table, with a wooden board, a tattered cloth, straw-stuffed cushions, sack-like pockets, and topless cues.

After a couple of hours at this cheerful exercise, they washed their chalky hands, put on their coats, and ordered their horses.

‘Tom,’ said a young farmer, tapping Newell on the shoulder, ‘here be three of us going the same road as you and Bill, as fur as *The Five Ales*. We’ll go on there with ye, and have a half-way glass to wet your wheat-monies.’

As he spoke a man who had been crouched close to them under the shadow of a wall, and whom none of them had observed, stole silently away.

‘They say it’s bad luck to stop on the road home,’ said Tom, doubtfully.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIVE ALLS.

HALF way between Dulton and Saltwich—a little village neighbouring upon the Chalk Pits' and Gravelly Shoot Farms—was a way-side public-house which bore the allegorical sign of *The Five Alls*.

This sign represented five human figures, with a motto painted under each.

A king with his regalia	..	and the motto	I govern all.
A bishop in his pontificals	..	„	I pray for all.
A lawyer in his gown	..	„	I plead for all.
A soldier in his uniform	..	„	I fight for all.
A countryman with his scythe	..	„	And I pay for all.

Twenty yards off stood a hand-post, with its four white arms pointing down the four cross-roads.

Three years before there had been only one hand-post within five miles of this spot, and that so defaced and overgrown with moss that it was impossible to decipher a letter. But fortunately

a justice of the peace happened to lose his way among the dark woods which encircled it, and did not arrive home till his soup was ice, his fish rags, and his sirloin of beef a cinder. An order was consequently passed by the Dulton Bench, that hand-posts should be erected in all the parishes under their surveillance, at every cross-road and turning—the expenses to be defrayed by the funds of the respective parishes.

In rural districts, before any improvements are permitted to be made, or nuisances removed, a human being must die, or a magistrate be inconvenienced.

In the days of the defaced hand-post, before steam had been utilized, and thoroughfares built of iron, *The Five Ales* had been a large coaching hotel, furnished with an unbounded amount of accommodation for man and beast. Now the landlord had turned small farmer and had aggrandized his stables into barns, and degraded his spare bedrooms into lumber-garrets.

However, the good dry skittle-ground still remained, and the hum of voices, and incessant rumbling from within, proved that this scientific game did not lack supporters.

It was a long low cattle-shed kind of place, with benches down the walls and at either end. In the opposite corners were two small tables filled with mugs and pipes.

'Come on, let's ha' another ge-ame!' cried a lusty young fellow with his sleeves rolled up to his shoulders. 'Come on, ye haint done het, be ye?'

'I doant know rightly what to say about 'ut,' replied a middle-aged man, also in his shirt-sleeves. 'Ye be too good for me, a-doubt.'

'Noa, noa; come on,' returned Absalom, with the mellifluity of a Whitechapel skittle-sharper. 'Luck be sure to change. Doant be so quavery-wavery over ut. Let's have one more pint, however.'

'You start fust, then.'

'Get out of my way, some of you, and make yourselves look less,' said Absalom, in a voice prophetic of victory. Taking from the ground a heavy wooden missile of the shape of a cheese, he poised it between his fingers as if it had been a pebble, and casting the whole weight of his body into the throw, pitched the ball towards the four upright pins. It struck the front pin on the left shoulder, and pivoted round the ring, knocking all four down.

'Brayvo! brayvo!' cried the rustics, knocking their great mugs against the tables, and afterwards applying the moist rims with unction to their lips.

'That was a squiver!' said one of them. 'Nothing like a flat ball to tiddle 'em over.'

'Fust hoss * to Absalom,' cried another, drawing a l in some spilt beer.

'You've got your Sunday play on to-night,' said Thomas, dismally, as he took the ball in his hands.

Only one pin fell, which, after rolling about among the others, and creating a false interest for a moment, calmly subsided in the dust.

'There, I give 'ee the game and the pot. There's no tackling ye at skittles to-night, that's sartin. It's no-how, and it taint no-how, and I can't make no-how on't, nother.'

'Who's the next?' shouted Absalom. 'Will e'er a one of ye have a shy for a pot, or won't ye? I'll bet two to one as I gets the three fronts, and I'll teck it even I floors 'em.'

'I'll back Nancy agen 'ee for a gallon, if a like,' said a man.

'Nay, nay,' cried a loud but not inharmonious voice; 'if old Nick wer here—'

'Hoosh! hoosh!' said a dozen tongues.

'Who cares about your hooshing? I baint afeered of no mortal thing, nor unmortal, nother: man, beast, or sperrit.'

The voice came from a young woman who now advanced into the middle of the shed. She was very tall, and finely, though perhaps almost too

* A game of skittles is divided into three 'horses,' as a rubber of whist is divided into three games.

lustily, formed. Her face and arms were sunburnt, but the skin was soft and clear, and there was a delicious flush upon her olive cheek, and a light in her scornful and imperious eyes which made her haughty and beautiful as a gipsy queen.

‘Ye’re all a pack of fools!’ she cried, and gave her head so indignant a shake that her long coal-black hair came falling down till it had reached her waist, ‘a froughtenin’ yourselves about Mother Brewer’s ghost. Who is there as has seen it for true, I should like to know?’

‘I ha’,’ said a man. ‘I wer a-walking across the common here when I found a somethin’ white and ghastly a-walking beside of me.’

‘How big was it?’

‘About my height, as nigh as can be. And it never said a word; and just as I wer ready to drop, it vanished clear away.’

‘And then we all knows,’ said another, ‘as only t’other night her voice was heard in the passage by the tap-room, where she called Brewer three times by name, and many bein’ by; and it was only yesternight as she came and patted the white cow while Martha wer a milkin’ on it.’

‘This be very sartin,’ said a tall pale woman with a child in her arms, ‘if she could come back arter she’d gone she ’ould. Her mind was all here when she died. When she was in her

last hour her little darter came up to see how she was a-goin' on. "*Mind the bisness*," said she, quite sharp-like. And when Brewer came up she sent him down agen quickish. "*Don't mind me*," or "*Mind the customers*," those were nigh the last words from her dying mouth. Loard! she was an owdacious woman after money, sure alive! Not as I knows anythin' about it though. Don't let yourselves be guided by me; Mrs. Absalom don't know anythin', Mrs. Absalom don't.'

'She must ha' growed a good bit since she died,' retorted Nancy; 'for she was a good head shorter than that gawk there when she was here. It's all nonsinse, I tell 'ee. If pipples goes to heaven, d'ye think they'd want to come back to this — rotten hole; and if they go to the other place, why the Old Man he'll look arter 'em for that.'

'Ha' the fust drink of the new pot,' said Absalom, 'and doant 'ee cuss and sweer; I hates to hear a woman sweer.'

'Darn ye; I'm not goin' to drink your froth for 'ee. I'll have some o' the middle if I has any. And you'll find it as thick as molasses, I'll warrant. That old fool Brewer poured a lot of beer into a barrel without cleaning out the dregs, and a nice mess he's made on it. The way bisness is done here now 'ould make his dead wife walk, if anythin' could, if it didn't make her run.'

'Aint nobody seen nothin' of never a hat nowhere,' inquired a thin old man, in a querulous voice, twisting in and out of the crowd like a ferret in a rabbit-burrow.

'One 'ud think your silly old head wer inside on ut, a wanderin' about like that there,' said Nancy.

'Don't 'ee say much to him,' said Mrs. Absalom, compassionately. 'Poor Luke Godwin! He's aged wonderful fast these last three years. He don't seem like the same man.'

'Ho! ho!' guffawed a rustic. 'There aint much left of Luke now.'

Poor old hoss! poor old hoss!
Once I eat the best of hay
And lived in a foine stall;
But now I eats the short grass
As grows agen the wall.
Poor old hoss! poor old hoss!
Thee must die.'

'Ay! ye may laugh and sing,' said Luke, shaking his head, and his voice quavering. 'I mind the time when I used to troll that same ditty to grey hairs. It s right it should fall back on me now.'

'*Poor old hoss!*' chanted Nancy.

'But when I wer young I was as lissom as ever a young man here. I baint so strong now as I should be though. When my feyther wer eighty years old he could carry a sack of wheat

up a ladder into a granary; and my mother's hair, when she was an old 'ooman, was as black and shiny as jott, and poured over her shoulders like a wild colt's mane. I doant know rightly what makes me weaker than they. My arm be a-withered up like a piece of burnt pig's flesh, and my poor chest do hurt me dreadful when I breathe. I think the beer can't be so wholesome as it yoosed to be.'

And Luke, taking his half-pint mug from the table, peered into it and found it empty.

'Why it's run out!' he said.

A hoarse giggle from an urchin in rags pointed out the culprit.

'Ah, well, run out a-top, I 'spose,' he added, resignedly. 'Now, Brewer, let's have another half-pint o' twopenny; and draw it thickish, 'cos I aint had my supper.'

Luke always had his beer by instalments of half-pints, because he thought that he got more that way. Sometimes he drank as much as eight half-pints, on which occasions he would chuckle gravely in his sleeve, and persuade himself that he had cheated the landlord of a noggin.

'Come,' said Nancy, 'if we've done skittlin' let's be goin' indoors. Have your half-pint there, old 'un.'

'Master Newell and they be a-keeping it up,' said Absalom to Nancy; and pointed at the light

which shone under the door, while they could hear the sounds of songs, and laughter, and the tinkling of glasses.

‘Yes, some of them have sold their wheat,’ said Nancy, composedly.

The tap-room was a small square apartment, with a large, old-fashioned, deep-dingled fire-place, a well-stocked bacon-rack, a deal bench round the room, and a little closet in the corner, which they called the bar.

Over the mantel-piece was a smoke-blackened board, on which were inscribed in dingy, yellow letters—

When first I came I some did trust
And did my money lend ;
But when I asked for the same,
They soon forsook their friend.
Now my care is no man’s sorrow—
Pay to-day, and trust to-morrow.

However, a scrawl of chalked hieroglyphics on the back of the bar-door proved that the practices of the publican were less resolute than his professions.

On entering this room they found that a stranger had arrived while they had been at skittles. The little girl who served the beer and tobacco was engaged in clearing away a cold gammon of bacon and the remnants of a loaf. And in the dingle, with pipe in mouth, and beer-mug in hand, was seated a man of singularly

unprepossessing appearance. His forehead was very low ; his hair bushy and ash-coloured ; his mouth stretched crescent-like from ear to ear, and, when he spoke, disclosed a line of teeth black and yellow, like discoloured pegs. His eyes were small, and had a peculiar expression. They glanced, they did not look. They fluttered restlessly about, and dropped when they were observed.

His tongue was fluent, and, unasked, explained the motives of his visit. He was a journeyman cobbler, tramping it through the country with the view to a small town or a large village where he might buy a business, or set one up at an advantage. He had thought to have got as far as Saltwich by this time, but had found the way longer and harder than he had expected, and so had dropped in there for an hour to eat a bit of supper before continuing his journey.

He told all this in a learnt-by-heart kind of way, and though he said z for s, and h for w, polysyllables crept into his sentences as if he could speak better English than he cared about taking credit for.

He asked plenty of questions ; cracked plenty of jokes ; and sang several songs. But he was a little discomfited to find that a pair of great dark eyes were always upon him, and were thrust into him by the nerves of the retina like two of his

own sharp-pointed awls. Also that the face to which they belonged bore an expression of inquisitive sternness which did not tend to place him at his ease. He saw that this look was part curiosity, and he feared that it might be part suspicion.

A few moments afterwards the broad form of Thomas Newell filled the doorway. All of them rose and touched their caps or curtseyed.

‘Where is Brewer?’

‘Out lookin’ arter the horses, sir.’

‘Here, little Martha, come to me.’

A little girl about fourteen years of age tripped up to his side. Her face ought to have been childish, but it had been prematurely aged and sharpened by business.

He made her hold out her hands like a saucer, and poured silver into them till the coins overflowed upon the floor.

At this sight the cobbler’s eyes shone like burning coals, and he half started from his seat. Then he bit his lips, and glanced round him uneasily: but all eyes, as his, were fixed upon the bright money. All but Nancy’s; and she was gazing at the farmer’s face.

‘Here, my lads,’ said he, ‘it isn’t often I give ye a treat; and as I’ve sold my whate and got a good lump of money into my pocket, it’s only right you should have a jolly good drink with ut.

Give it 'em out in the sixpenny, my little lass, and then what they do drink will do 'em good.'

The rustics gave a loud cheer, in which they congratulated him upon his good fortune, as well as themselves upon his generosity.

'I be downright glad he's sold his whate,' said Absalom. 'He aint all eyes and ears like some measters: and he knows how to let a poor man off his first fault.'

'He was one of us once, ye see,' said his mother. 'He's bin taught to eat poor man's bread and to do poor man's work, and he knows what it is as comforts a poor man's heart. It's only such as he that pities the poor. The rich and idle don't pity 'em, for they doant know what hard work, nor hunger, nor sufferin's like.'

The beer being brought in lulled the conversation. The stranger glanced at Nancy once or twice, and was relieved to find that she no longer paid him any attention.

'What sort of road be it from here to Saltwich?'

'Very fair, 'ceptin that bit down the Red Hill.'

'Oh, that's bad walkin', be it?'

'Taint such bad walkin': but it's bad for them as rides or drives down ut, as Master Tom 'ull have to do to-night. We can allers tell round here when a farmer's growing timersome, by his

getting off his horse to walk it down that hill. And no wonder; more than one neck's bin broke there since old Luke Godwin here can remember.'

The cobbler told a story about a gig accident.

'I must come and sit by you,' said Nancy: you be the only one here as knows how to talk. Loard!' she cried, taking up a stick which was resting against the wall, 'you know how to take care of yourself out o' nights. And what's this on the top. *Why it's lead!*'

'I like to have something in my hand beyond my fist to depend upon,' said he. 'I've got a little money with me in case I do make a start in trade, and I'm in no whim to lose it.'

'You needn't be afeerd o' yourself in these parts,' said Absalom. 'Anybody might walk hereabouts blindfold with a purse of gold dangling out of his pocket, and nobody wouldn't meddle wi' it.'

'You've forgotten young maester Simmons,' quavered the aged Luke. 'I be an old man, but I minds things better nor you do, seemily. He was a-drivin' home from Dulton Fair, and jist as he was a-goin up a bit of a hill with trees a both sides he felt heavy on his chest, as if he had a fit coming on, only instead of a fit it was a stout rope which two men held across the road and tiddled him out of his gig. And when he was

down they was on him in a minit, and plundered him of his gold watch and five yaller soverins.'

'That's the story he went home and told his mother,' said Nancy, scornfully; 'but I can pretty well guess how it was. Some of them flaunting hussies got and colly-fogled him into the booths to dance wi' 'em, and then while he wer only a thinkin' how pretty he wer a-doin' his steps, whip! goes his money and his watch out of his pocket into theirs. But there! no one can blame a traveller for having a stick wi' him. How's he to know whether this country's safe for him or whether it baint?'

She rose from her chair, and, as she passed by the cobbler her foot tripped over his, and she fell upon him, her elbow striking him on the breast.

He looked at her anxiously as she recovered herself; but she only showed her white teeth, and with some homely joke upon the circumstance, went to the other end of the room and sat down with her head leaning on her hand.

'Now, old Luke, here's a pot of beer for 'ee if ye'll sing a song. How'll ye have it, hob or nob?'

Hob is beer placed upon the hob to warm: nob, beer on the table.

'None o' your warm beer for me, landlord. Don't 'ee know what my kinsman yoosed to say?

When my back won't warm my bed, sed he, and
when my belly won't warm my beer, sed he, it's
time as I wer gone, cos I aint no yoose to the
world, and the world aint no yoose to me.'

'That's a good sayin', Luke, but sing a song,
however.' There's *Oh once I was a young man!*
that is a fust-class un. Will ye sing it now, or
wait for the beer?'

'Oh, I'll have a cut at he while my head's
hot,' said Luke, wiping it as he spoke.

OH ONCE I WAS A YOUNG MAN!

Oh once I was a young man, oh then, oh then, oh then!

Oh once I was a young man, oh then!

I'de a hoss for to ride,

And a su-ord by my side,

And the world it went well with me then, oh then!

And the world it went well with me then!

Oh then I got married, oh then, oh then, oh then!

O then I got married, oh then!

And then my wife did die,

And I'm dalled if I could cry,

For the world it went better with me then, oh then!

For the world it went better with me then.

We put her in the coffin, oh then, oh then, oh then!

We put her in the coffin, oh then!

And we put her in the coffin,

And we couldn't cry for laughin',

For the world it went better with me then, oh then!

For the world it went better with me then!

We carred her to the church, oh then, oh then, oh then!

We carred her to the church, oh then!

And the music it did play,

And we danced all the way,

For the world it went better with me then, oh then!

For the world it went better with me then!

A comin' whoam from church, oh then, oh then, oh then!

A comin' whoam from church, oh then!

'Twas there I spied a lass,

And her eye did shine like glass,

And my heart it was with her then, oh then!

And my heart it was with her, oh then!

Oh then I got married, agen, agen, agen!

Oh then I got married agen!

But my wife she proved a sot,

For she loved her pipe and pot,

And I wished for my old wife agen and agen!

I wished for my old wife agen!

'Now what's the toast to be, Luke?'

In the country a song is always followed by a sentiment.

Luke took the quart-pot between his hands, and swaying it to and fro as he spoke, applied it to his lips as he concluded:

Here's good beer, I loves thee,

In thee I puts my trust;

I'd sooner have my belly-full

Than go to bed with thirst.

It is good beer that's ruined me

And kept me from good clothes;

So here's good beer, I loves thee,

And down my neck you goes!

'Why Nan, Nan, ye seem quite doley to-night,' said handsome Absalom, putting his arms round her waist. 'Ye aint out o' sorts, be ye?'

'No, Absalom, I'm well enough; but don't fret me; I feel teased about something.'

'Come, measter,' shouted the landlord, 'drink off your drink and steal no lambs. He was

hanged as left his drink behind him. Why he's gone !'

'Who's gone ?' said Nancy, with a frenzied look. 'Who's gone, I say ?'

'The shoemaker ; and his mug not half out nother. Dalled if I can make it out rightly !'

'Is Master Newell gone ?'

'No, my gell, and don't mean to go het. There's a brave spank on 'em in the parlour to-night.'

The rustics now began to criticize the departed stranger, as it is the custom in this world to criticize the departed.

'There's somethin' in his face,' said Absalom, approaching the semi-circle before the fire, 'as makes me think as he's not a good man !'

'His tongue's honey, and his heart's gall,' said his mother, plaintively : 'and I s'pose somebody 'ull deny that 'cos it's me as said it.'

'I wouldn't trust him no funder nor I could see him,' said Luke, sagely ; 'and that aint fur on a railroad.'

'He was born in the middle of the week and looks both ways for Sunday—the squintin' gal-lus !' said Brewer. 'I abominates anybody slip-pin' off like that without saying a civil "good night ;" don't you, Nancy ? Why *she's* gone, and only nine o'clock ! Dalled if I can make it out rightly.'

* * * * *

‘Come Tom, are you going to make a horse’s meal and drink nothing?’ said Henderson, a young gentleman who farmed his own estate, in white gloves from Woodstock, and in peg-top trousers from Miles of Bond Street. ‘Have another glass of brandy-and-water. it will be like mother’s milk to you.’

‘Like stepmother’s milk, perhaps. No, my boy, I’ve done pretty well as it is. A drunken night, they say, makes a cloudy morning; and we farmers want all our wits about us at dawn of day.’

‘Youv’e got a rest for a bit, now you’ve sold your wheat.’

‘A farmer who looks after his business never has no rest; and a good job too. If I had nothin’ to set about, I should be jaunterin’ here and there and everywhere, spendin’ all my money: I shouldn’t stay at home—that would be too dull for me.’

‘A good thing can’t come too often,’ roared another; ‘so pass the lush. Don’t squat there, Bill, spitting into the fire like a great roasting apple. Liquor up man—liquor up!’

‘I shall have a bottle of soda-water, and be goin,’ said Tom. ‘Master Brewer, bring me a bottle of soda, will ’ee?’

‘What! be you a-goin’ to drink soda-water?’ cried a farmer, with the red face and portly

stomach of the old school. 'It's more than I'd venture on, I can tell 'ee. I had one once, and a-massey O! I was forced to keep my mouth open all the way home (and a bitter cold wind), for whenever I shut it the dommed stuff came a-rooshing up into my nose and eyes till I was most afeerd as my head 'ud tumble off—that I did, as sure as my name's Beenswold.'

Tom Newell drank his bottle of the dangerous beverage, and having shaken hands with 'em all went out into the yard accompanied by his friend Sampson.

'That's a rare idea of yours about our all three living together, Tom. It had allers seemed to me like robbing you of her, after she had kept your house for five long years. And be keerful riding home, brother; for I can call 'ee brother now. That mare has had a gret feed of corn. How she pricks her ears, and paws her feet, and stares round her all ways at onst. Ye've got a kerb on: that's right: I don't like the looks of the beast; and they say, Tom, a bolting horse is an open sepulchre. Good night, brother,—good night. Dall it, I can't say good-bye to 'ee, somehow!'

And he stood there wringing his hand till Tom had almost to tear it away.

He stood there and listened to the quick tramp of the horse's hoofs, till the sound became in-

audible. When he returned to the parlour, they bantered him about his gravity, asking him if he had seen Mother Brewer's ghost.

'I'd go up-stairs backwards to-night, Bill,' suggested Farmer Beenswold, 'in case anything should catch 'ee by the heels.'

They laughed and quaffed till nearly dawn ; and the labourer rising by candle-light, and the chaffinches who (by tradition) are awakened by the first gleams of the morning-star, might have heard their final chorus,

'Twankedoolo, twankedoolo, twankedoo-lo-lo
And he that loves strong beer is a hearty good fellow.'

* * * * *

When Newell had ridden some distance he fancied that he saw a woman in the middle of the road about twenty yards in front of him. He reined in his horse, and at the same time a melodious voice sang, to a quaint and singular air, these words, which have been sung by the peasant-girls of those parts for more than a hundred years :

As I was a-walking out one day, down by a river-side,
A-looking all around me, an Irish girl I spied.
How red and rosy were her cheeks, how coal-black was her
hair,
How costly were the garments this Irish girl did wear.

Her shoes they were of Spanish black, all spangled o'er with
dew,
She wrung her hands right piteously, alas ! it is too true ;
'I'm a-goin' home, I'm a-goin' home, I'm a-goin' home,' said
she ;
'How could you go a-rovin' to slight your poor Polly ?'

When last I saw my own true love he seemed to be in pain,
With sorrow, grief, and anguish his heart was rent in twain,
But there's many a man that's worse than him, so why should
I complain?

Oh love it is a killing thing. Did you ever feel the pain?

I wish I was a butterfly, I'd fly to my love's breast;
I wish I was a linnet, I'd lull my love to rest;
I wish I was a nightingell, I'd sing to the morning clear,
I'd sit and sing to you, my love, I once did hold so dear.

The figure drew nearer and nearer, as the voice sang, and when the last verse was concluded, a beautiful girl was standing beside him, searching him with her dark voluptuous eyes, and her soft brown hand caressing his.

'Ah!' said he, 'here's a pretty face which I've known a goodish while. But what are you doin' out at this time o' night? They tell me, Nancy, that you are not the same quiet little girl that used to go out nutting with me six year ago, but that you be growed into a rough, bad woman. I hope that's not my doin', lass. I shouldn't feel happy if I thought it were my doin'.

'No, Master Thomas,' answered the girl, in a tremulous voice, as she walked on beside him, holding the horse's bridle in her hand, it isn't no fault o' yourn. When ye told me as I couldn't come with 'ee to your new house, I felt wild-like and half silly, and went to work with them as talks and does before a young gell as if she wer the same as a man. It's them as taught me to be rough and bad: and I see now how wise you

was to forbid me as you did, tho' I thought it cruel then. What's happened between us since that day, but a few months ago, shows me how wise you was. Ah! Master Thomas, you couldn't keep wise as you began, and I—I'm a poor weak fool, that has no head nor heart of her own when your eyes be a-shining on her face, and when your words be a-whispering in her ears.'

The young farmer's face grew cloudy and dark.

'Yes, Nancy, the most prudent men are silly at times, and the most prudent women are silly at all times; and it's mostly the women as suffer. But you must try and forget all about that, my lass: and whenever you're out of work or in want of anything, you come to Tom Newell, and he'll show you that he's not the man to forget any one he's done an ill turn by. But I must be off now, or my sister will be fretting. Let go the bridle, sweetheart.'

'I can't let ye go yet, Master Tom: I wants to speak to 'ee about something: something as must be spoken now, for to-morrow would be too late.'

She stopped the horse, and curled one arm round his waist. He looked at her: her eyes, usually so black and fierce, were now soft and beseeching, and shone with a light which he had seen in no woman's eyes before.

'If anybody was to see us here, Nancy.'

'Let us go off the road a little way,' she said ;
'Here is a nice broad path.'

And without giving him time to remonstrate, she led the horse among the trees till they were quite out of sight of the thoroughfare.

'Well, Nancy,' he said, good-humouredly, 'what is it to be ?'

'If you will get off your horse, sir, I will tell you.'

He dismounted as if she had laid a spell upon him.

'Now,' she said, resting her two hands upon his shoulders, 'it's to be that you're not goin' home to-night.'

'Where am I to go, then ?' and he laughed.

She pointed to a light which glimmered faintly between the trees.

'That is Mother Wooton's cottage, where I'm a-livin' now, because my parents and me have had words. You're goin' to sleep there to-night.'

'And what for, Nancy ?'

'For this,' she said. And she put her lips to his ear, as if the words she whispered were too terrible to be spoken aloud, even at the dead of night, and in that lonely place.

He laughed her to scorn.

'I tell ye, it's true!' she cried, impetuously.
'I heard him askin' questions about the road and

the Red Hill. I felt the pistols in his breast; I felt the stick filled with the murderin' lead.'

'How can I stop away a night from home without letting them know? You don't think of my poor little sister, who's waitin' and frettin' for me even now. She'll be sending men out with lanterns for me presently.'

'You go on to Mother Wooton's, I say; and I'll go down to Gravelly Shoot and tell 'em some tale or other.'

'It won't do, Nancy,' he said, now more convinced than ever that she was deceiving herself or trying to deceive him. 'It won't do, old girl. My whip's got a very respectable lump o' lead at the butt-end of it, and the parish lantern shows a good light. I'll teck my chance of it.'

'Thomas,' said the girl, in a choking voice, 'ye told me just now to forget what happened between us not long ago, when your head was lost to pleasure and when my heart was lost to you; but now I tell ye that something will soon see the light which 'ull prevent my forgetting that foolish hour for evermore; which will live by me night and day to remind me with its voice and looks, that I must allers be a thing of shame, and that Thomas Newell . . . O, master Tom, forgive me if I've angered you, but I meant to've kept it all hid from you that I might suffer by it, and only I: but I tell ye of it now that I may

ask ye by that which is your'n, and your'n alone, not to go down the Red Hill to-night. I ask ye this kindness by the memory of those pleasant hours we spent together six years ago, when we both were children and thought no harm. I ask ye this kindness by that which will soon make ye love me or hate me more. I ask ye again, Thomas, by my love which is warm for thee, by thy sister's love which is tender; by thy God's love which is great, not to go down the Red Hill to-night.'

He muttered a few inarticulate words, while all his limbs trembled with emotion.

'I've done you harm, girl,' he said, at last. 'I've done you harm. I must try to mend it, and there's only one way.'

He gave a deep sigh and turned from her.

'I shall see ye to-morrow. I shall have good news for you then, Nancy—good news for you then. Ye shan't be ruined by me, lass. One of us must pay for our fault, and it's right the stronger should pay.'

She stared at him vacantly.

'And why not?' he murmured; 'she is handsome, and she is hard-working, and she loves me. That is more than all the grand ladies round here will do for me. They'd take my name and my money, but they'd jeer at my homely ways, and want me to turn squire, may-be.'

'Nay, lassy,' he said, caressing her soft glossy

hair, and her cheeks, which flushed beneath his touch. 'Thee'd not make a grand lady, but thee'd not disgrace my parlour a-Sundays. Come to me to-morrow, Nancy, and I will tell ye more. I must bid thee good-night now ; my sister will be weary of watching : I must go.'

'No ye shan't!' she cried, flinging her arms round him. 'Ye shan't go ! ye shan't go !'

He struggled to get free, but her arms encircled him like two bars of iron. He found that he was wrestling, and put forth all stratagems and all his strength. But he had taught her to wrestle himself, and he found that she had not forgotten his lessons.

'Ye shan't go, if I hold 'ee here all night,' said the girl, mildly, and even smiling a little. 'Ye see I'm quite strong enough for farm-work, master Tom. There's few as can fork hay agen Nancy.'

As she spoke his features assumed an expression of fright, and he shrank back crying, 'The ghost ! the ghost !'

Nancy gave a shriek and turned round. She saw nothing but the moonlight shining on the silver ash, and the dark shapeless forms of the bushes and the trees.

'It's gone now,' he said, with a loud laugh, as he unhooked the bridle from a branch and sprang gaily into his saddle. 'I thought you wern't afraid of ghosts, Nancy.'

‘Thomas,’ she said, in a faint voice.

He rode up to her side.

‘What must be, must. It is no use trying to cross the path of God. Will you give me one kiss before you leave me, Thomas? one of those you used to give me six years ago.’

He embraced her tenderly, and kissed her chastely on the forehead, and called her *his wife*.

At those words she gave a low and plaintive wail.

He kissed the tears which were streaming down her cheeks; he inhaled the sigh which was rising from her heart.

Then he galloped swiftly away.

She sat down upon the trunk of a fallen tree.

The sky gathered over with clouds, and a cold wind muttered among the branches, and strewed the ground with brown and yellow leaves.

The clouds grew darker and heavier, and rose towards the moon, which was still shining brightly.

She rose suddenly, and ran with the speed of a deer down the road by which her lover had gone.

At that moment the moon was darkened by a small black cloud, and the wind, rising, moaned among the leaves like the roaring of the waters of the distant sea.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RED HILL.

Morning. Annie busying herself about the house, rubbing here, scrubbing there, and sometimes sitting down to do a bit of patch-work. She was as very a little busy-body as ever tucked up her sleeves on a Saturday afternoon. It was pain to her, she said, unless she was a-doing. All her linen was home-spun, her bacon home-fed, her bread home-baked, and her beer home-brewed.

She went on with her work assisting and not retarding the domestic, and singing snatches of love songs to lighten the toil which was so light already. Thus the hours flew by till their spokes became almost invisible, and she could scarcely believe her senses when the clock told her, with its harsh brazen tongue, that it was—

Afternoon. When she had taken her dinner she found that there was no more hand work to be done in the house. The floors were lamentably

white, while the brown furniture, shining from elbow-grease, and the pewter dishes, reflected her face in a dozen different shapes and sizes.

She felt too restless to sit down to needle-work, so slipping on her bonnet and shawl she went out for a walk.

She directed her steps almost unconsciously towards the Red Hill.

Evening. The sun was kissing the earth with its last golden rays when Annie reached the summit of the Red Hill. It was a wild place. A steep hill strewn with stones and a rain-formed gutter running down the midst; high banks on each side upon which grew an avenue of oaks, and whose branches formed a green canopy above; in one part the bank overhanging the road formed the caricature of a cavern, and it was under a such-like shelter that a shepherd and his daughter had crept one stormy afternoon. The bank gave way beneath the violent rain, and had descended like a fatal avalanche upon the father and the girl.

Annie descended the hill, sometimes stooping to pick up those small round stones which will throw down the most sure-footed horses, and against which there is no guard but a watchful eye and a wrist of steel.

She stopped for a while to gaze sadly at the mass of stones and earth from the fallen bank,

which was still suffered to litter the side of the road.

It was not the first time that she had passed the death-place of the peasants, but now it seemed to affect her more than it had before.

There are moments when our hearts open of their own accord to melancholy impressions ; when a tune of music will bring the tears into our eyes, and when some simple tale or sight of suffering will fill us with the presentiment of a terrible misfortune.

As the sun sank below the earth, as the curtain of darkness fell softly from the sky, as the nightingale poured forth his first sweet song, Annie Newell drooped back upon the bank, and covered her face with her cold and trembling hands.

Night—She was sitting in the parlour. Sometimes she would start upright in her chair and listen eagerly, then she would try to reproach herself for expecting him so soon.

‘I must do something,’ she said, and took from the book-shelf a manuscript book bound in paper. In this book she wrote down her thoughts and actions, and also the recipes for such dishes as her brother loved. She wrote till her eyes and hands ached, but her mind had not been with her work.

‘How late it is!’ she sighed to herself as she

glanced at the clock, the hour-hand of which pointed to eleven.

She rose and went to the window.

The sky gathered over with clouds, and a cold wind muttered among the branches and strewed the ground with brown and yellow leaves.

The clouds grew darker and heavier, and rose towards the moon, which was still shining brightly.

She went again to the book-shelf and took a volume from it at hazard; it was a romance of the last century, written with exaggeration but with terrible power.

As this sensitive young woman read of murders and ghosts, her form stiffened like a sitting corpse, her eyes protruded, her lips uttered low gasps; at every gust of wind which shook the casement she started as if she had received an electric shock. At last she could bear it no longer; the very words in the book seemed to have become blood-red, and long black spots ran up and down the page.

She let it fall to the ground, and ran to the window for fresh air. She leant out and looked up towards the sky, listening.

At that moment the moon was darkened by a small black cloud, and the wind, rising, moaned among the leaves like the roaring of the waters of the distant sea.

She remained with her eyes fixed on the black vault of heaven, and still listening.

As the clock struck twelve she heard the faint ring of a horse's hoof; it came nearer; it rang harshly on her ears; it was close to her; she could not breathe.

It passed her, snorting savagely, foaming at the mouth, riderless.

* * * * *

Three men stood round it in the yard; one of them held a lantern.

‘He’s bin throwed, has measter, for sartin.’

‘The mare ain’t bin down,’ said the man with the lantern, examining her knees, ‘and measter aint the man to be throwed easy!’

‘What be this on the saddle? Lend us your lantern.’

‘Well, what be it, wet?’

‘Wet! ay man,—wet blood!’

‘Blood! then there’s bin foul play wi’ our young measter!’

‘Ay, there’s bin foul play wi’ our young measter!’

‘Go to the Red Hill,’ said a voice from behind him.

When they heard this voice, so harsh, so hollow, and so sad, they all shuddered.

It was Annie Newell, her hand resting on the wall, her cheeks livid.

‘Go to the Red Hill,’ she said again; ‘go with your lanterns, and you will find your young master lying dead upon the ground.’

* * * *

What are those lights which glide along the black surface of the earth? They are not will-o'-the-wisps; they do not dance, nor flutter, nor seem to die away to burn up brighter than before. They advance slowly and steadily, and swaying like the censers of the priests above the altar.

Yet their track is marked by neither path nor road.

They are lanterns borne across the fields by them who search for the body of a dead man.

Do you hear the voice of the nightingale? She is singing as sweetly as if there was no crime, nor pain, nor sorrow in the world; and yet her lays seem sad. They say that the nightingale dies always singing, and perhaps she is singing the dirge of her own death.

The clouds have melted away, the moon and the stars shine brightly; it is perhaps to welcome a true soul to the throne of the God which gives them light.

Let us return to the earth.

There were three men with lanterns in their hands; they walked silently.

A dark mass loomed before them; it was the Red Hill.

As they entered the shadows of the first tree a cold chill fell upon them, it was like entering a churchyard at midnight.

Half way up the hill, where the trees were thickest, they found a woman seated in the middle of the road.

‘What beist doing here?’ they cried, as they surrounded her and grasped her by the shoulders.

She sprang to her feet and flung them from her with the strength of a giantess. One of them reeled backwards three yards, *then he tripped over something*, and fell shrieking.

‘Droop your lights, droop your lights,’ cried the woman, with a hollow laugh.

They lowered their lanterns till the ghastly yellow light streamed full upon the face of Thomas Newell.

There was a hideous gash upon his forehead, from which the blood was still flowing over his cheeks and neck; his lips were blue; his eyes were fixed and glassy; he was dead.

They remained for some time gazing horror-struck on the features of him whom they had loved so well.

Then one of them, as if struck by a sudden thought, turned and flashed his lantern into the woman’s face.

‘And what be *thou* a doin’ here, Nancy Mid-

dleton, with blood on thy hands and madness in thy face, alone with a murdered man ?'

She paused, while her nostrils dilated and her lips curled disdainfully.

Then she said, smiling bitterly :

'I am come here to watch by the dead body of my sweetheart.'

CHAPTER XIV.

A YOUNG GIRL'S SWOON.

As the cry of 'FIRE!' will frighten the worst sluggards from their beds, so the tidings of this frightful murder awakened even Dulton from its wonted sleep.

Men ran through the streets, and stood in knots by corners, and sat in circles in the ale-houses. There was but one look in their faces, as there was but one word upon their tongues.

On market-day there was a mournful meeting at the ordinary, and most of the farmers wore crape upon their hats and sleeves.

'You've heard of poor Tom Newell?' they said, as they shook hands; 'he was the bravest lad in all the country round.'

Many of the young farmers were not content with lamenting him, but scoured the country upon their hunters, examining every strange face with suspicion, and asking questions of all the

publicans in the neighbouring villages and towns.

‘It must have been a stranger that did it,’ they reasoned; ‘Tom Newell never harmed nor quarrelled with a soul in his life.’

The shops of the gun-makers were crowded from morning to night with farmers, who tried the springs of pocket-pistols, horse-pistols, and revolvers, with grave and anxious faces.

The village surgeon was sent for, to attend upon Miss Newell. He found her weak and dejected as a woman about to die; her face furrowed by the tracks of the scalding tears which she had shed; her heart faintly fluttering like a wounded bird.

And at her bedside there was a young man who gazed upon her with eyes full of tenderness and tears, and who watched her as the shipwrecked watch the distant sail which will save them from death, or plunge them into irretrievable despair.

The coroner’s inquest was held at ‘*The Five Ales*.’ A verdict was returned of ‘*Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown*.’ The public-house was filled all that day and night, for peasants celebrate all events by drinking muddy ale, as we celebrate them by eating putrid venison.

Nancy Middleton was still there; she was sitting in a corner of the tap-room, with her elbow resting on the table, and her face covered by her hands. She remained thus for several hours.

Then she awoke, and, rising, staggered across the room, casting her fireless eyes around as if she was walking in her sleep.

‘Ye ha’ nearly got yourself into a mess, Nan, a-follerin’ arter him like thart,’ said some clown. ‘It’s most a wonder as they hadn’t a-nabbed ’ee on sishpishink-like.’

She flung her clenched hands in the air.

‘I saw him sitting in that chair,’ she cried, ‘and I knew he was a murderer by his eyes. O foolish! why didn’t I throttle him as he sat. They would ha’ hung me for’t, but Thomas would ha’ bin saved. Oh, Thomas, Thomas! why did ye leave me? I prayed ye to stay, I prayed ye to stay; but ye knew that I loved ye, and thought that I was telling a tale to deceive ye.

‘Ah!’ she said, slowly and sadly, while her eyes were fixed upon the red coals in the fire, while her hands writhed upon her knees, ‘I don’t mind sayin’ now that I loved him. It won’t disgrace him now that he’s in heaven. We went out nutting and cherrying when we were girl and boy together, and neither of us thought of any harm. Ay,’ she said, louder, and panting as she

spoke, 'and it was on the Red Hill, at the place where the trees be thickest, and the shadows deepest, and the violets sweetest; at the place where the doves built last year, and we sat listenin' to their soft cooings: at the place where his cold corpse was lying three nights ago, and his blood upon the stones—there it was as he met me one day, not long since, and put his strong arm round my waist, and kissed me with his lips as he never did afore; and he took my hand in his, and told me pretty stories about fairies in the sun, and of sperrits in the air, and of angels in heaven; and God knows as we thought no harm. We was young, we was foolish. Perhaps God will forgive us, though men never will. I couldn't ha' loved him if he'd been false and bad and drunken, such as you be here: but I loved him with my heart, he was so strong and good. And, O men, he was sweetly beautiful! his cheeks were fair and ruddy—his hair was brave and brown; but gie us . . . gie us . . . '

'She's fainting, ye fools,' cried Brewer, running to her, and catching her as she fell back. What bladder-headed owl was it as set her off a-talkin' on him; I'd split his mortal skull, I would.'

'Let me look at her,' said a gentle voice.

An old woman was standing among them. She was neatly dressed, with a little basket

on her arm. Her features were peaceful and benignant.

‘Let me look at her,’ said Mrs. Wooton, and she bent over the lifeless face.

She felt her pulse, and nodded gravely to herself.

‘Let her have some brandy,’ said Brewer.

‘Not a drop of anything stronger than water,’ said the old woman, sternly. ‘Harm will come to the girl if she touches beer or sperrits for some time yet to come; so mind that, all of ye.’

In a few moments Nancy began to recover: Mrs. Wooton stooped and whispered in her ear. The girl’s face flushed immediately to a bright scarlet, and rising hastily, she left the house, accompanied by Mrs. Wooton.

CHAPTER XV.

MAN-TRAPS SET HERE.

I now enter upon a fearful study ; it is that of a heart which, though young, is seared, withered, depraved, and which can no longer throb for aught but blood and gold ; it is that of a mind which is strong to resolve, patient to wait, relentless to execute ; it is that of a woman who possesses the face of an angel and the furious passions of a demon of hell.

Charlotte Chatfield had once in her life become human ; she had loved ! She had offered a man this love, which was fiery as her rage ; he had refused it, and in refusing it he had told her the terrible secret of her own life ; by some means he had discovered the crimes of her girlhood—adultery, theft, murder. For this she hated him, and with no common hate ; for this she determined to be avenged, and with no common vengeance.

Retiring into the depths of her black heart,

she conceived a terrible plot, which will make you shudder as it opens its poisoned folds.

For first she knew that it would be necessary to blind the eyes of her victim before she raised the knife to strike.

And as victims destined for the sacrificial altar were in times of yore decked with beautiful flowers and marched to death to strains of sweet music, so Charlotte Chatfield, summoning all her glorious beauties, all her fiendish arts to her aid, attempted to blind this young man with her kisses, to crown him with the garlands of illicit love, and to lead him towards the precipice while her voice murmured music in his ear.

Thus she gained an influence over Augustus Dangerfield, which, forearmed as he had been by the knowledge of her crimes, he would at one time have deemed impossible.

All was prepared for the first act of the drama of death, but now she required a tool. She sought the streets, therefore, and examined faces as they passed. She required as her dupe a young man of susceptible affections and a ductile mind.

She found him at last, and it is thus that she laid her snares.

* * * * *

On the borders of Regent Street there is a fancy bazaar which is frequented by half the

lounging world of the metropolis. It is a great market of ornaments ; and pretty girls, modestly dressed, stand behind their miniature stalls coaxing you to buy with their bright eyes. There is a gallery also furnished with stalls, and from one corner of which proceed selections of the favourite operas by a violin, a cornet-a-piston, and a piano.

One afternoon at four o'clock, when the lounge was in its zenith, a young man fashionably dressed entered the bazaar. A moment afterwards a woman thickly veiled entered and looked round her. When she saw that he was there her eyes gleamed through the veil. Raising it she disclosed a face which was pale, chaste, and beautiful as that of a Madonna. Presently he passed her ; she fixed her eyes on him. As he *felt* those eyes, so full of languor and love, he started and blushed. She did not blush, but she looked upon the ground and turned modestly away. He followed her. She left the bazaar ; she had no need to look round, with the ears of a hare she heard his steps behind her.

He passed her and glanced at her over his shoulder. She gave him another look. He walked slowly that she might overtake him. Then he passed her again ; then he spoke to her.

She answered him in a confused tone. He asked her, stammering, if he might escort her.

‘But I do not know you, sir,’ she said, gently.

‘That is true,’ he answered, with a sigh.

She placed her hand on his arm. ‘I will trust myself with you,’ she said, with a frankness that pleased him, with a smile that enraptured him.

Before half an hour had passed they were acquainted with the secrets of each other’s lives. She was a dressmaker : her father and mother were both dead : they had apprenticed her to Madame Devey, and in her fine school of needle-work she had become a first-rate work-woman. Madame Devey had wished to keep her, and had even offered her the place of ‘first hand,’ and its salary of £100 a year ; but she was tired of the late hours and the large work-room, and its eternal hum of voices and crackling of needles. She wished for independence, and had taken a first floor to herself near Regent Street. As she was clever in her business she earned enough, by working hard, to support herself, and even contrived to send a present sometimes to a bedridden aunt, who was dependent upon charity for those little luxuries which are the same as necessities to sick people.

His name was Edgar Hamilton ; he was the son of a baronet, who was rich and liberal. He told her he had every enjoyment that he could wish for, but that he was not happy. He had no one to love him, he said. His mother had died when he was young ; he had no sisters ; he

had soon sickened of those pleasures of the town for which so many young men ruin themselves ; he never entered his club ; he did not care for the society of men ; he felt himself alone in the world.

The young dressmaker gave a smile. It was evident that he was romantic.

She retained a kind of reserve during this interview, but consented to meet him the next day at the Marble Arch.

‘I have no work to do just now,’ she said, ‘but when fresh orders come in I shall have to stay at home and be very industrious.’

He met her several times in this manner. When he invited her to accompany him to places of amusement she always refused.

‘We cannot talk to each other there,’ she would say, and then she would caress his arm with the soft hand which reposed upon it.

His cheeks would flush as he received these caresses. She, who always watched him, would smile when she saw how powerless he was when he was with her.

One day she said, ‘I cannot meet you to-morrow ; a lady has given me an order for a dress ; she wants it immediately, and I must not stir from my room till I have finished it.’

‘I should like to ask a favour of you.’

‘What is it?’

‘But I am afraid you will not grant it.’

‘You do not tell me what it is.’

‘No, because I am afraid to.’

‘Am I so terrible, then?’

‘No, I am not afraid because you are terrible.’

‘Oh! you are not afraid because I am terrible ;
that is very strange.’

‘I am afraid of you because you are lovely.’

‘Yes.’

‘And because you are virtuous.’

She pressed his hand.

‘You are a good fellow, Edgar, and quite different from other men. Tell me what it is you want.’

It was the first time she had called him Edgar.

‘I should like to—to come to see you.’

And he got very red.

‘What! in my own room? that would not be proper, would it?’

‘I don’t know; I only know that I should like to come.’

‘But it’s such a poor room.’

‘That is nonsense.’

‘And you are the son of a baronet, you know; you are so much higher than me.’

‘If that is your only objection I shall insist upon coming.’

‘Oh, you insist, then!’

‘If you please,’ said Edgar, humbly.

‘Mind, I shan’t leave off work for you.’

‘On the contrary, I shall try and help you.’

‘Oh! I dare say you will be a deal of use. But now I must go and buy the material for the dress.’

They shook hands. Then Edgar took the hand which she had ungloved and placed it between his. He looked at her, and was ravished by her beauty. How pure and white her forehead was! and her cheeks tinged with a delicate colour! her lips red and pouting! and her eyes so sweet, so pure, so limpid, that he could read, or fancy he could read, all the secrets of her heart therein.

‘But you have not told me your address,’ he said.

She nestled her bare hand a little closer between his.

‘It is No. 3, Ryle Street, Regent Street. Ask for Miss Mary Doyle.’

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO FACES UNDER ONE HAT.

ON Pack-rag day (the twenty-ninth of September) the serfs of agriculture pack up their clothes, and seek fresh masters.

And on this day the farmers, dressed in their Sunday clothes, ride to the mansions of their landlords, their faces bright with honest pride, their leather bags portly with gold coins and bank notes.

The landlords, seated before their blue bundles of quarter bills, receive their tenants with smiles of welcome and gratitude.

In some parts of England it is still customary among lords of manors and proprietors of large lands to give a dinner to their tenants on the rent-days. But these quarterly debauches are now rapidly dying out of date, and will soon no longer exist, except in the hall of some youthful squire who may be gifted with a dramatic passion for revivals.

This year Dulton Hiring Fair happened to fall upon the quarter-day, so all the farmers of the neighbourhood paid their rents early, and rode on to the town to engage their carters, shepherds, or farm-maids, for the ensuing year.

Dulton was a pretty town, for it was built upon the banks of a river, and could boast of a ruined castle and two fine churches. But the streets rivalled those of Cairo, which are the narrowest and dirtiest in the world, and centred in the market-place.

In this market-place the fair was held, though many of the booths and canvas-covered stalls extended down the Egyptian thoroughfares, choking them into impassability.

Once into the arena of the fair, and the noise was deafening ; but a noise so like that of people enjoying themselves that he must have been a flinty philosopher who could get out of temper with it. There was Wombwell's brass band playing their loudest tune, the envious exhibition of the dwarf and the giantess trying to crash them out of hearing with a big drum, a cracked bell, and a pair of iron clappers ; an auctioneer bawling with brazen lungs, and impudence, on the qualities of his wares, which, with the cracking of whips at the whirligig, the snapping of guns at the nut stalls, the artificial screams of the young women, and the hoarse guffaws of the young men,

combined to turn Dulton, for one night only, into a perfect little Babel.

The crowd was composed of three distinct classes; first, those who came for amusement only.

Smock-frocked bumpkins, and gaily-dressed lasses, who had taken a fresh lease of servitude, and who had been permitted to enjoy a genuine holiday—clergymen and other professional men of status and respectability, who walked awkwardly through the crowd, trying to look as if they were not enjoying themselves—twenty-two boys from an adjacent boarding-school, walking in couples like prisoners out for exercise, with the head-jailer in black trowsers and blue spectacles, anxiously clearing a way before them—and above all a rosy-cheeked housemaid, who having stolen half-an-hour's liberty under pretext of an errand, was taking a sip at those waters which Solomon affirmed to be so sweet.

Some came only upon business. Austere old maids, who scowled upon the circus, and sneered at the wild beasts—farmers and farmer's wives of the temperate-in-drink and intemperate-in-religion genus, who, like the Caliph Omar, deemed it necessary to make a hell of this world in order to merit heaven in the next—a small gang of pick-pockets—a host of young persons with painted faces and commercial smiles—and, let me add for

the benefit of my small readers, all the people engaged in the various places of amusement, even to the pretty girl who looked so happy as she danced on the tight-rope, even to the red-and-white faced clown who said such funny things that you nearly split your infantine sides with laughing.

And there were a great many people who went to the fair both for business and pleasure. Farmers and their wives of the true old Saxon sort, who went to hire their servants and to spend their money—artful little hussies who intended to enjoy themselves dancing in the booths, and to pick the hearts of fresh acquaintances, or to pull some irresolute swain over that matrimonial precipice on the brink of which he had long been oscillating—and the great mass of boys and girls who had come, to use their own words, ‘to see the woild beasteses, and to get bound to the varmers.’

In a hiring fair, those who offer themselves as grooms place a piece of sponge in their hat-bands; the shepherds a tuft of wool; the carters an inch of whipcord; and the boys-of-all-work a bunch of blue and green ribbons.

When a farmer wishes to engage a man he finds out a strong-limbed, clear-eyed young fellow, and they haggle. Both fight hard for their money and their money’s-worth, and will often separate after

half-an-hour's argument to look out for softer men. If a bargain is struck the farmer gives the man a shilling. This is called *the festin-shilling*, or *God's penny*, after receiving which the man is the farmer's slave, and, should he not appear at the time appointed, is liable to be sent to jail. It is, however, by no means a rare practice for a man or boy to engage himself at a fair on Thursday for 6s. a-week, we will say; at a neighbouring fair on Friday for 8s. a-week, and at another on the Saturday for 10s. a-week, closing with the three offers and only holding to the best.

It was night. The quiet natives of Dulton had retired to their beds. This was a mere matter of form, for the noise in the streets placed sleep entirely out of the question.

Now indeed the real fun of the fair commenced. Now the whole company of the very minor theatre were assembled upon the outer platform, and went through a mild pantomime, in which the clown was ill-treated by everybody, and had to content himself with making grimaces in revenge. These external preliminaries having been concluded, the 'dramatis personæ' retired from the platform, a last managerial warning being discharged: '*You'd better by half come in at once, if you means coming. We're going to begin now;*' while the harsh clang of unmusical instru-

ments from within, the shaking of the tent, and the delighted shouts of the audience, proved an interesting fact, viz., that there are still some spots in the world where theatrical announcements are not impostures.

The wild beasts had been fed. Wombwell's brass band had finished their last tune; and the shaven-cheeked, greasy-bearded performers were packing up their instruments, chewing their sore lips, and stretching their cramped and wearied limbs.

Life and jollity now rolled towards the dancing booths, washing into its stream all those who had been shooting at the nut-stalls, or who had been in to see the calf with five legs, or the wonderful donkey, or the live mermaid, or had been peeping in at the panorama of the '*Orful massacre in the Injies*,' in which the artist, wisely sacrificing truth to effect, had painted the murderous sepoy black as saucepans, with blubber-lips, frizzly hair, white waistcloths, and long spears dripping with gore.

Between two gingerbread stalls there was a brave hustle between two crowds—crowd No. 1 making for public-house, L. H.; crowd No. 2 pushing for dancing-booth, O. P. Both crowds were composed of true Britons, who will never believe that retreats are sometimes judicious.

Three men in particular might have been seen

pushing first one way, then the other, as if they rather enjoyed the scramble than otherwise. This did not escape the observation of others, who cried:—

‘Now, you black-mouthed ruffian, keep your elbows to yourself.’

‘Heigh! my Jack o’ dandy, you’ll spile your pretty gloves if you shove us common pipple about like that.’

‘Look at that old bloke with the green shade! How oneasy he is to find hisself somevares. Keep still, old genelman; we’ll make it right for yer, presently.’

‘Take care of your pockets!’ shouted a policeman from outside. ‘You as has got anything in em,’ he added, with official sarcasm.

‘Don’t squeeesh! don’t squeeesh!’ cried a cockney costermonger, with the good-humoured raillery of his class; ‘the doctor says I ain’t to be squeeeshed.’

‘O Henry!’ murmured a female voice from the abyss.

‘Well, you knows I aint. Arn’t I took physie this morning? You knows I are.’

It is impossible to say how long this contest might have lasted, had not several persons cried out that they had been robbed, and called to the police, three of whom heroically charged the crowd, and knocked down two old men and a boy.

After which they clumsily noted down the depositions of the plundered ones in their pocket-books, with looks of solemn authority, and words of the obscurest promise.

Half an hour had passed.

At the door of a small tavern which bore the sign of *The Rifles*, and over which a Union Jack was suspended, stood three or four soldiers of that unwashed stamp which haunt the dens of Orchard-street and the purlieus of the Bird-cage walk. There was an awe-stricken semicircle of rustics at a little distance, before whom stood an enlisting sergeant—his features bloated from adulteration and alcohol—hectoring, with his naked sword waving in his hands.

‘Come, my lads,’ he bawled, ‘take the Queen’s money and join our gallant comrades in the East; they want a little help to kill all them * * *s who’ve been butchering the poor women and children. Come now, you with the white dudley, we can’t get on without you; you know there isn’t such another pair of shoulders as yours in the whole army: why it’s a real sin for a handsome fellow like you to be digging the filthy ground when you might be making a fortune out in the Injies; there’s no lack of gold there. Come now, take the shilling, and you’ll come back a gineral, with white stars upon your breast, and a mahogany box full o’ yaller sovereigns.’

‘Don’t ye do nothink of the sort, lad,’ said a young woman standing by. ‘He only talks like that ’cos he gets so much a head for every fresh fool he takes in. Take the Queen’s shilling, quotha! If it was to a man’s good to go a sodgerin’, d’ye think they’d want to tempt him with a shilling? Go to the wars, and what will they give ye for it? A bit of ribbon, or an iron cross, may-be. It’s a hard world for humble folk: in war they does the fighting, and others git the reward: in peace they does the hard work, and others reap the money. Don’t ye be kiddy-kittled into it, my lads. They make the gentlemen ginerals, not the private soldiers; an’ all the gold plunder goes to the Government as stays at home, not to them as risks their lives for it abroad.’

‘I never did strike a woman,’ said the sergeant, with the fierce gestures of a bandit at the Bower Saloon; ‘and—’

‘Ye’d better not begin now, or pr’aps ye’ll find my arm as strong as your’n. Lawk!’ she said, giving him a playful push in the chest, which sent him reeling against the wall, ‘ye’ve drunk and drunk till ye’ve made yourself no better than a bladder blown out wi’ gas. Ye’re a nice sort o’ gineral, ain’t ye?’

The clowns, who infallibly join with the stronger side, hailed their hero’s discomfiture

with loud shouts of derision, and closing fearlessly round him, chanted the cynical refrain—

A sarjint stepp'd up to me, and asked me to 'list,
I bid him stand back, and I showed him my fist.
Too-ral-ido!

‘That’s the way to sarve out them ‘listin’ sarjints,’ moralized Nancy. ‘They bring more sorrow and heartaches upon the poor than all the tax-gatherers, and squire’s stewards can do. Why, Absalom, Absalom! ye ha’ got gay ribbons on to-day. Hast caught a master with all thy finery?’

‘Don’t you know the British colours, my girl,’ said an old soldier standing by. ‘Your Absalom has enlisted.’

‘Oh, Absalom!’ she said, in a low reproachful voice, ‘and ye ha’ left your poor mother to starve or go to the House. But there! it’s no yoose talking now: words can’t free a bound man, nor yet any money that she or you could find.’

‘I’ll come back some day a rich man,’ faltered Absalom, who having partially recovered from the quatern of gin, under the influence of which he had enlisted, began to feel qualms respecting his future welfare.

‘I should ha’ felt this more at one time,’ she murmured, ‘for you’ve been kind to me, Absalom, and it don’t take me long to count my friends.

But now I've only one thought in my head, and one grief in my heart. I can't think nor feel of anything but him.'

She turned her back upon him and went half-way down the tavern passage. There it was blocked up by soldiers, who appeared to be discussing the character of one of their acquaintances.

'He's got the oil-bottle in his pocket,' were the first words she caught.

'I don't like a man as puts salt into his own beer and sugar into mine,—at first sight, too. 'Taint nat'ral or seemly that he should.'

'Who be thart then?' asked Nancy.

'An old man, my dear, as has been pouring melted butter down all our backs, and talking to us as if we were all field-m Marshals.'

'Ye sodgers want to keep all the blarney to your own mouths. But what sort of man be he?'

'Short and dirty like a winter's day, with a green shade over his eyes.'

'There's some truth in what he said though, that it's we privates as wins all the battles, while the gineral's keep out of harm's way.'

'Ay,' said the old soldier, joining the group, 'but ye might as well put a horse into a gig and tell him to drive himself to London, as to set an army at an army without a gineral to hold the reins. And it wants a brave man too, to gineral

in a fight: when the cannons are roaring, and the wounded are groaning, and the smoke is thickening all round him, it's hard work to keep one's head calm and cool, to see what redgements want help, and what redgements can do by themselves. But here, we are sorry soldiers, to lumber up the passage, and none offering to move to let a pretty girl go by. Will ye have a glass of gin, my sweeting?'

'No, thank'ee: I'm going to eat a bit of bread and bacon, but I maunna touch sperrits.'

So saying, Nancy pushed a way through the soldiers, and slipping into a dark corner, asked them to bring her a pennyworth of bread and two pennyworth of bacon.

She soon perceived the subject of the soldier's conversation. He was a bent, white-haired old man, with a green shade over both eyes, and dressed in a kind of cloak with loose sleeves.

At the next table, with a huge cheese before him, and a glass of cold brandy-and-water at his side, sat a stalwart, broad-shouldered man, with a hard square cast of face.

Near the window lolled a young gentleman who was well-dressed and bejewelled, and who held a lighted cigar between his kid-gloved fingers. He must have wandered in there for a few moments from curiosity, unless he was one of those gentlemen, by birth, but not by

breeding, who drink the dregs of society by preference.

Nancy recognized these as the three men who had been so energetic during the hustle.

‘Bring us a grey-beard of Husser-and-Squench-cher,’ said a rustic, in a smock-frock, from the corner opposite to Nancy. (A grey-beard is one of those jugs commonly used in ale-houses with the face of an old man upon them. Husser-and-Squench-cher is a dram of gin, and a quart of beer, mixed). ‘That was a bad job,’ observed the same rustic, addressing the man with the green shade, ‘that ’ere job on the Red Hill.’

As he said this the man with the hard face, and the young gentleman who was smoking, glanced at each other.

‘Terrible! terrible!’ said the man with the green shade. ‘Murders get more and more numerous every day.’

When Nancy heard him speak she gave a start, and half rose from her seat. Then she shrank back farther into her corner, and listened with gleaming eyes.

‘It worn’t done for spoite or such as that,’ said the rustic, drinking from his mug, and setting it down upon the table with a bang; ‘it wer done for money, measter; for his watch was gone, and all the big lump o’ money which he’d took for his whate. Some London game, I doubt.’

‘Like enough, like enough.’ And the man with the green shade appeared to fall into a reverie.

‘And be you a stranger in these parts, measter?’ asked the other with provincial curiosity. ‘If it be a fair question, leastways.’

‘Yes, I only came here this morning. I want, if I can, to get hold of a saddlery business somewhere hereabouts; I don’t mind where it is so long as I—’

Nancy Middleton bounded like a panther across the room; she sprang upon him with a horrible shriek. The room was filled in an instant. They found this girl with her knees upon his chest, and her hands upon his throat strangling him. They tore her from him, and looked with terror upon her bloodshot eyes and her quivering hands.

Two men slunk unobserved from the room.

‘She is mad,’ they said.

‘*Mad!*’ she cried, and with inconceivable strength she broke from them and darted upon him again. She tore off his wig and green shade; she tore open his coat, and pulled out a brace of pistols, which she flung upon the floor.

They saw before them a man with fluttering conscience, stricken eyes, and long thin hands clasped imploringly towards them.

‘I did not do it; indeed I did not do it!’

‘Did not do what?’ said the sturdy Absalom,

thrusting his fist within an inch of the pallid mottled face.

‘He says that he did not murder Thomas Newell,’ answered Nancy Middleton. ‘You see he knows what he is charged with, although he’s never been in these parts afore this morning.’

‘You must come with me, my man,’ observed a policeman, pompously. ‘Wig! green shades!! pistols!!! I must put a pair of new ruffles on your wristband, my beauty, and take you to Gradborough Castle to spend your Christmas in.’

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INNOCENT DRESSMAKER.

A CLEAN maid-servant showed Edgar Hamilton up to Miss Doyle's work-room. It was a small, bare room, with printed patterns pinned against the wall, and a large deal table in the centre strewn with needles, stilettos, piercers, bodkins, scissors, and other implements of the craft. She was sitting in a Windsor chair, and held before her a square deal board.

She rose when he entered, and took his hat and gloves from him, and seated him in a chair close to her.

'Now mind what I told you,' she said, smiling; 'I must go on working.'

'May I talk to you?'

'Oh yes, you may talk as much as you please; that will not interrupt me.'

'Well, I shall ask for explanations of your millinery proceedings.'

She burst out laughing.

‘Do you think that I am a milliner, then? Milliners only make bonnets, you great silly.’

‘And which is most difficult, millinery or dress-making?’

‘It requires taste to be a milliner,’ said Mary Doyle, sententiously, ‘and art to be a dress-maker.’

‘I see; their merits are often confounded, like those of Dickens and Thackeray, as being of the same species, when they are altogether of a different character.’

They began to talk about *Oliver Twist* and *Vanity Fair*. She said she thought that it was wrong to write books about thieves, or to describe such women as Becky Sharp.

In the meantime she had pinned a piece of white calico upon the board, and upon that had placed a paper pattern, which she informed him was called a boddice or corset pattern.

Having pinned the pattern to the lining, she pierced holes along lines that were inked upon the pattern. Removing the pattern, she seized a pair of formidable scissors and proceeded to cut out the lining into shape, the pierced holes acting as her guide.

‘We experimentalize upon calico,’ she said; ‘it would not do to make any mistakes with the material.’

She took a piece of gray moiré antique from the large deal table, spread it upon the board, placed the lining on it, and cut out the material from the lining as she had previously cut out the lining from the paper pattern : with this difference—that she divided the solid piece into five or six smaller pieces ; for the body of a dress, which appears a uniform whole to masculine eyes, is, in reality, composed of distinct and several members. Each of these pieces she *basted* (sewed slightly) to the lining, and finally stitched them together.

Edgar watched with wonder her little hand, which moved with such rapidity, and her needle which twinkled like a gleam of light.

He watched her thus three hours. Then she held up to him the body of the dress with an air of pride.

‘Is it complete?’ he asked.

‘No ; I am going to trim it now.’

‘You must not work any more ; I am sure that you have done enough.’

‘Oh ! indeed, I have not ; we must not dawdle much over our work ; ladies are so impatient to have their new dresses.’

She took up a piece of riband-velvet, and placed it on the body in squares, graduating it from the top downwards ; after which she stitched some small velvet buttons down the front, leaving a space of an inch and a half between each. Finally

she took a strip of whalebone, and cutting it into pieces, placed one in each seam of the body.

‘That is to make the dress set right,’ she said ; ‘and now my labours are finished, as far as the body is concerned.’

‘But what is this for?’ he said, laying his hand upon a packet of wadding.

At that moment the servant came in and handed her a letter. She read it, and immediately burst out crying.

He knelt before her, and taking her hands in his, implored her to tell him what it was.

‘Oh, my poor aunt,’ she murmured, ‘my poor aunt!’

And she told him, between her sobs, that the only son of her bed-ridden aunt was a cabinet-maker ; that he had been unfortunate in business ; that he had become bankrupt ; and that in three days he would be in prison.

‘You gentlemen,’ she said, ‘who jest with each other about the Insolvency Court and Whitecross Street Prison, perhaps cannot understand the horror which the industrious poor feel at being sent to prison. To be imprisoned for debt is almost the same with them as being sent to jail for theft. We have always been very poor, sir, but there has never been the least blast against our good name before. We are as proud of that

good name as a lord of his title, or a king of his crown. Oh! if he were sent to prison, it would kill my poor aunt, I know it would; it would kill her! it would kill her!

‘But listen to me,’ said Edgar, clasping her hands impetuously, ‘listen to me. You say that in three days he will be sent to prison?’

‘Three days will soon pass,’ she said, mournfully.

‘What is the amount of his debts?’

‘It does not say, sir. But read the letter yourself.’

She showed him the letter. It was written in a feeble, cramped hand, and was as follows:—

‘my deare mary

‘poor wiLliam is in dark truBle noW. hee iS banGrupp and if hee dose nott Pay in three Dayes will be put in gail. It will be sadde Blow, deare, and its A gret som of monee, mor than wee couLd get in eers. God onLy can helpe us. praY to Him for yow and bill and me.

‘Your lovinG aunt

‘martha hiGGins.’

‘Do they live near each other?’

‘Yes, close: William in Ealwell, and aunt about a mile out of the village.’

‘The bank will be shut up now,’ he said, look-

ing at his gold watch ; 'but to-morrow I will go there at ten o'clock, and take out all the money I have there. I dare say I shall have enough to settle matters with the bailiffs.'

'What!' she cried, starting to her feet.

'I say that I will go down to Ealwell with you, to-morrow, and get your cousin out of trouble.'

Mary Doyle turned from him, and covered her face with her handkerchief. Then she released the muscles of her face, and a black tide of passions surged across it, while her eyes shone like those of a wild beast.

Revenge was at hand.

'You are a generous man!' she said, turning to him, with composure. 'You are an angel of mercy, who will save a woman from death, a man from misery, a family from shame.'

Then her voice became inexpressibly soft and sweet.

'Edgar, I love you! From this hour I am yours. I will lay down my life for you—I will be your slave.'

He was still kneeling before her. She took his head between her hands, and caressed it, and cradled it on her bosom. He became almost delirious. He was in heaven. He believed that he was loved—and loved for the first time.

'We are lovers now,' he whispered.

‘Yes, and, like true lovers, we will wander to-morrow in the woods, and gather the last flowers of autumn. We will plight our troths to one another, and carve each other’s names on some old beechen tree.’

‘To-morrow!’ he cried; ‘oh, that it were here! I shall not sleep to-night, Mary; the hours will pass like days.’

‘You must sleep,’ she said, caressing him, ‘and then, perhaps, you will dream of me. Oh, it is delightful to dream of those we love! For three nights, Edgar, I have dreamt of you. Those nights were not long and weary, for you were always with me.’

‘And you love me?’ he murmured.

‘I love you with my heart, and with my life,’ she cried.

He closed his eyes, and fell into a celestial trance.

Her hair had become unloosed, and swept over his face; her hands fondled him: sometimes she stooped and kissed his forehead.

There was a low knock at the door, so low that it was a mere sound—a whisper of the hand.

She started.

It was followed by two more.

She bent her lips to his ear.

‘Edgar, you must leave me now.’

‘Leave you!’ he murmured.

‘Yes: the people of the house will think it

strange if you stay here so long ; to-morrow, dearest, I shall expect you.'

'To-morrow !' he replied, almost mechanically.

'To-morrow.'

She led him to the door of her room. They embraced each other on the threshold. His embraces were warm and passionate as those of a young girl who burns with virgin love. Hers were cold and false as those of a courtesan who sells her kisses to buy her daily bread.

When the servant had let him out of the door she returned to her mistress.

'Well ?' asked the latter.

'The Dandy's come, and is in the parlour.'

'Come back already !'

'Yes, something's gone wrong, I think. When I let him in he was looking black as a thunder cloud, and called me all the names he could lay his tongue to when he heard you had some one with you.'

'I will go to him immediately. And you can pack up these things and put them by in the lumber-room. I shall not want to use them any more.'

'The trick's done then, is it ?'

'It will be, to-morrow.'

She went down into the parlour.

'Where have you been ?' said Dangerfield, savagely.

‘On a good lay,’ replied Charlotte, calmly.
‘And you have just bungled one, I suppose, with your theatrical airs, and your coat buttoned up to your throat like an inspector.’

‘There’s been no bungling of mine. The Screever’s nabbed, if you want to know what’s up.’

‘The Screever nabbed!’

‘Nabbed for the Red Hill business by a woman who saw him before he did it.’

‘It was a wise thing going to that fair at all, wasn’t it? But you will have it that yokels don’t know B from a bull’s foot, when they’re as knowing as you are sometimes.’

‘It’s no use talking about it now,’ said the Dandy, sulkily; ‘I shall have to run my neck into the noose, to prove an alibi for him if I can. That’s what we agreed upon beforehand, and I suppose I ought to stick to it. But let that pass. What is this lay you were talking about?’

‘A young gentleman will escort me into the country to-morrow.’

‘Will he!’

‘I have made him suppose that I am a dressmaker, and that I have a relative who is going to be sent to jail for debt. This debt he means to pay.’

‘You made it a high figure of course?’

‘I did not name a figure. So he will bring all the spare blunt he has.’

•

'Where do you mean to take him to?'

'Ealwell.'

'The dark wood?'

'Yes.'

'By the withered oak?'

'Yes.'

'I do not know how it is; I have mislaid my pistols somewhere.'

'Do you want to shoot him then?'

And she eyed him keenly.

'Shoot him!' said Dangerfield. 'Ho, no, I must be driven hard before I kill a man for a bit of dirty money, when there's plenty to be got without. But if you shove a pistol into a man's face, his hand finds his way to his pocket twice as quick as it does for a knife, or a Neddy.'*

After conversing for half an hour upon other matters, Dangerfield rose.

'Where to now?' she asked.

'To the ken in Frederic Street. There's a "chapel" there to-night.'

'Is it quite settled about to-morrow?'

'Yes. To-morrow about noon; in the dark wood; by the withered oak-tree.'

'Yes, and to-morrow,' muttered Charlotte Chatfield to herself, 'you will place a rope round your neck, which shall strangle you whenever I raise my hand.'

* Life-preserver.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE WITHERED OAK-TREE.

EDGAR HAMILTON was awakened by the bright sun, which, streaming upon his face, reminded him how he was to spend the day. He rose and dressed himself quickly with a sparkle in his eye and a smile upon his lips.

He was at the bank door before it opened, and marched to and fro before it like a sentinel. When he asked for the whole of the balance due to him the clerks raised their inky eyebrows, and the veteran cashier looking at him gravely through his spectacles, handed him a heap of bank-notes with a sigh.

Edgar laughed. 'He thinks that I want it for a debt at play,' he said to himself.

A Hansom conveyed him to the nearest livery stables. He gave his orders, and in ten minutes a thoroughbred was harnessed to a dog-cart. He sprang into the box: the ostler running, led the horse out of the yard, and taking off the horse-

cloth with a graceful flourish, saluted him as he passed.

He was half an hour before the time appointed, but Miss Doyle was ready, dressed in one of those black silk dresses which are in such good taste, and which the young dressmakers of Devey's, Jane Clarke's, and Franz's uniformly wear.

'Is it not a delicious day?' he said, as he handed her into the vehicle.

'Yes,' she said, 'it is one of the last smiles of the year. Heaven could not frown upon the kind deed that you will do this day.'

'Do not speak of that; I shall be fully rewarded by the pleasure of spending a holiday with you.'

'Will that be a real pleasure, then?'

'Oh yes. I have not forgotten what you said. *That we shall plight our troths to one another, and carve each other's name on some old beechen tree.*'

They were in Piccadilly. 'Stay,' she said, placing her hand on his arm. 'We must not forget to buy the sacred knife.'

'That is true; I had quite forgotten it.'

They were nearly opposite a cutler's. He reined in the horse, an urchin standing on tip-toe took its head; they both alighted and entered the shop.

'Now you must let me choose for you,' she said, coaxingly.

They were shown several knives. She found them all too small. At last the shopman opened a packet which he brought from another room.

‘These are the famous American bowie-knives,’ he said. ‘They would do for anything.’

‘Buy one of those, Edgar.’

He bought one and placed it in his breast. A smile crossed her thin lips; the plot prospered.

The horse, delighted at regaining his liberty, pranced, reared, and finally dashed off at a gallop. Edgar glanced admiringly at his companion.

Any other woman would have screamed.

‘I am not easily frightened,’ she replied, calmly.

In two hours they were at Ealwell. Edgar, burning to console the sufferings of her poor aunt, proposed that they should visit her immediately.

‘Very well,’ she replied. ‘I will show you the way. It is a pretty walk.’

They entered a wood of oak and fir trees whose dark green branches flung sombre shadows upon the earth. They walked together some time in silence; Charlotte Chatfield engrossed by the thoughts of her daring scheme; Edgar Hamilton depressed, in spite of himself, by the noon-day twilight of the place, and by its mysterious silence.

‘This is not a pretty walk,’ he said; ‘it is very dark here, and the ground is covered with thorns.’

‘It is called *The Dark Wood*,’ she replied.

‘How narrow the path is, dear Mary; your dress will be torn to shreds. You must have mistaken the way.’

‘No, I have not mistaken my way.’

There was something strange in the tone of her voice. He looked at her. Her eyes were cold and glazed; there were drops of perspiration on her brow; he touched her hand; it was trembling.

‘There is something the matter, dearest. You have lost your way in this terrible wood. You are frightened.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘I am not frightened.’

All traces of a path had now disappeared. They were in the very midst of *The Dark Wood*. They could no longer see the sun.

‘Why do you not speak to me?’ he cried. ‘You promised that we should gather flowers together. But you have brought me into a wilderness; there are no flowers here; there are only thorns.’

As he spoke, a noise like the stifled laughter of a madman sounded above their heads; it was followed by a rustling of branches. Charlotte Chatfield lost her self command, and screamed.

It was only a large white owl which they had disturbed from its perch, and which almost immediately disappeared.

‘We are nearly out of the wood now!’ cried Hamilton; ‘I see a circle of light above the trees.’

A few steps more and they entered a perfect little oasis of verdure and flowers, with a huge withered oak standing in the midst.

‘Ah!’ he cried, this is the surprise you have been preparing for me. Well then I will reward you.’

He rapidly picked a bouquet of anemones, and placed them in her hands.

‘Wait,’ he said, ‘this is the prettiest of all, and you must let me place it in your hair.’

She did not move, her eyes were wandering. He kissed her on the forehead, on the eyes, on the lips. She did not move. This only impassioned him more. As he attempted to crown her with flowers his hands became entangled in her long and silky hair.

‘I love you with my soul!’ he cried, and he poured upon her kisses that were hot as fire.

‘He will not come!’ she murmured to herself.

He observed her coldness, and became suddenly calm.

‘You are afraid, because you are with me in

this lonely place. But do not fear, Mary. I love you too much to insult you with so much as a bad word, or an imprudent look. I love you as a woman, but I worship you as a saint.'

'I do not fear you,' she replied, and caressed his face with her treacherous hand.

'Let us kneel among these flowers,' he said, 'and plight our troths to one another.'

They both knelt, the one transported with pure and holy love; the other listening for her accomplice to arrive.

'Dear Mary,' said the young man in a solemn voice, we now kneel in the temple of God, of which the green earth is the floor and yon blue vault the glorious dome; this spot strewed with flowers, the altar; and hark! there are sweet birds singing our marriage hymn. Do you love me, Mary?'

'I love you, my own, I love you.'

'Will you swear that you will be mine before God, the high priest who unites loving hearts? that you will be true to me? that you will never injure or desert me?'

'I will swear it.'

He raised her hands with his towards heaven.

'Repeat after me these words,' he said.

In the presence of the God who made me

In the presence of the God who made me

I swear that I will love thee and thee only

I swear that I will love thee and thee only

*That I will never betray thee, never forsake thee,
ever love thee unto death*

*That I will never betray thee, never forsake thee,
ever love thee unto death*

*And if I break this oath may His curse fall upon
me*

May his curse fall upon me

*May my hopes be crushed; my life cankered;
and my death terrible*

*May my hopes be crushed; my life cankered;
and my death terrible*

As she repeated these words she concealed her head in his bosom that he might not see her smile. He kissed her hair, and wound his manly arms round her form.

‘If he does not come I am lost,’ she said to herself. ‘I must keep this child here.’

She raised her head and pouted her lips towards him. When those lips touched his, they intoxicated him. He closed his eyes, while a thousand voluptuous sensations darted through his frame.

Sometimes he stooped to sip a kiss from that delicious mouth; sometimes to pour words, impassioned, rapturous, inarticulate, into her ear.

Suddenly her eyes gleamed, she tore herself from him, and ran to a little distance.

He also rose, wondering.

He heard the branches crashing and footsteps rapidly approaching.

A man bareheaded, and with a naked knife in his hand, sprang into the open space and cried in a loud vibrating voice—

‘Your money or your life.’

Edgar Hamilton was staggered for a moment, but that was all. He drew his bowie-knife and said, quietly—

‘I have been in Spain, and know how to fight with knives. If you attack me I will kill you.’

He took off his coat as he spoke and wrapped it round his left arm.

This was what Charlotte Chatfield had expected when she made him buy the knife. Dangerfield would now be compelled to commit murder or to die. If he conquered he would be thenceforth in her power; if he was killed she would be revenged.

Dangerfield bared both his arms and approached him like a cat. Hamilton shuddered at the sight of those eyes, so grey, so malicious, so determined. He glanced at Charlotte Chatfield. She gave him a look; to gain such another he would willingly have died.

Then the duel commenced.

Dangerfield sprang past him, striking at him. He wounded him slightly in the shoulder.

This wound, which would have chilled a cow-

ard, fired Edgar Hamilton, who was a hero. Turning round, he faced his adversary, and rushed swiftly upon him with dilating eyes. Dangerfield struck at his heart; he received the knife in the folds of his coat. Dangerfield could not extricate it, and abandoned it with a curse. Seizing Hamilton's armed hand by the wrist, he twined his leg round his opponent's and forced him to the ground.

But Hamilton, muscular as Hercules, struggled to his knees, bringing the other with him. Dangerfield seized his throat with both his hands; Hamilton stabbed him repeatedly in the sides and on the back, but from his cramped position could not wound him dangerously.

Then they rested, and with their faces but a few inches apart, glared savagely into the whites of each other's eyes. Without moving his eyes, which would have warned him of what he was going to do, Hamilton made an incredible effort and forced the robber to the ground.

He raised his knife.

But Charlotte Chatfield did not yet wish to be revenged.

'Oh, Edgar,!' she cried, 'do not kill him!'

At the sound of that voice which he loved so well, the eyes of the poor young man wandered, and his grasp insensibly relaxed.

Quick as fury Dangerfield bounded to his feet,

tore the knife from his hand, and buried it up to the hilt in his breast.

His face became livid, his eyes rolled in frightful agony, and the blood bubbled from his mouth.

Dangerfield, beholding death for the first time, horror-struck, knelt by his side, as if to implore his forgiveness.

The murdered man tried to speak, but the life-blood rushing from his heart prevented him. At last he murmured in a stifled voice, one word.

It was *Mary*.

He thought of her when he was dying.

His murderer hid his head between his hands, and groaned aloud.

'Mary, Mary,' cried that poor dying voice.

'Yes,' she said, and she bent over it.

His eyes dilated with horror. Her face was cold, and impassible as a marble statue.

He tried to take her hand: it cost him such pain that he almost expired. It was only after a few moments that he could speak again.

'Mary, do not look like that. Tell me that you love me.'

She gave a laugh, and seized his watch from his breast.

'Yes,' she said, 'I love you—for this.'

He uttered a horrible cry.

She drew the bank-notes from his pocket.

'And for this.'

Dangerfield grew pale.

The dying man looked at him.

‘Raise me,’ he said.

Dangerfield passed his arms round his waist, and raised him, almost tenderly.

The blood which streamed from their wounds began to mingle.

He could now only speak in a hoarse whisper, which was frequently interrupted by spasms of pain.

‘I pardon you,’ he said; ‘you have killed me, but you have not deceived me.’

He turned towards her, and the flame of life expiring with him burst into strength for one brief moment ere it for ever died. He struggled to his feet, and extended his pale hand towards her.

‘Assassin!’ he cried in a terrible voice. ‘I leave you in the hands of God.’

His eyes turned glassy: he gave a little sigh, and fell back dead.

Dangerfield covered his face with his guilty hands. He was now a murderer.

Charlotte Chatfield began to count the bank-notes.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD CARVED LION.

ON the outskirts of the city of Gradborough there was a large but ill-garnished hotel. It was too grand for the farmers, too shabby for the squires, and too isolated for the general visitors and sight-seers.

The Old Carved Lion had therefore to subsist upon stray birds of passage, and upon such as fled to it for refuge from the high bills and indifferent attendance of the other hotels.

It was one of those vast edifices which had been raised in the old coaching times, and which science, with her wand, had changed to a sepulchre, in which were interred all the romance of travel, all the glorious associations of the past.

Now, the landlord lost money every year by that which had once been a vast annuity; and you might see the occasional customers wandering in and out of the great sitting-rooms, like

knights-errant searching for an enchanted princess through the courts and saloons of an enchanted castle.

There was an ostler in the stable-yard, dozing upon a dungheap. There was a boy blowing his fingers as he squatted on the flags. It was the evening of the 2nd of January ; it had been a raw, chilly day, and now that the sun had set, it seemed colder than ever, though no one had seen its light nor felt its warmth.

Stamp, stamp, stamp—clatter, clatter, clatter. The ostler opened his eyes.

‘Osses a-goin’ to the livery stables,’ he muttered; and the eyes closed.

But the sounds, instead of growing fainter, became more loud, and the ostler opened his eyes indeed when he saw a gentleman, mounted on a fine black mare, ride into the yard, followed at a respectful distance by a servant, in plain livery, on a sturdy cob.

As the gentleman dismounted, the ostler glided to the horse’s head with all the empressement of his younger and his busier days. The servant also alighting, lowered a heavy carpet-bag from the pommel of the saddle upon the back of the urchin, who toiled with it towards the kitchen door, like a snail crawling beneath the weight of its enormous shell.

An aged waiter met the gentleman at the door, and saluted him with the politeness of the old school.

‘Can I have a bed here to-night?’

The waiter assumed an air of reflection, as a dealer of bubbles when asked if he has shares to dispose of.

‘I *think* we can manage it for you, sir. I will ask the chambermaid. Harriet, can this gentleman have a nice room here to-night?’

The little Jesuit’s forehead became clouded with fictitious thought.

‘The gentleman can have No. 3; we are not so very full to-night. Would you like to see your room, sir?’

‘Yes, and a fire in it.’

‘What name, sir?’ interposed the waiter.

‘Mr. Francis Fortescue.’

‘Take any dinner, sir?’

‘Yes, the best you can get, and let my servant have what he wants.’

‘Private room, sir?’

‘Who is in the coffee-room?’

‘A gentleman of the county, sir; he’s taking a chop with tomata, half a pint of sherry, and a little rhubarb pie and custard. There’s no one else, sir.’

‘I will dine in the coffee-room.’

The chambermaid now made her appearance

from below, with a faggot of wood, a box of lucifers, and a handful of brown paper. Having conducted him to No. 3, she began to lay the fire.

‘You have got a magistrate down stairs?’

‘Yes, sir; a Mr. Scarisbrick.’

‘And what is he for?’

‘Sizes, sir,’ said the girl, who having now succeeded in lighting the fire, drew back from it, brushing the chips from her apron.

‘And when do the assizes come on?’

‘To-morrow, sir, at nine o’clock.’

She loitered round the fire for a few moments, adjusted the coals on the top, fanned doubtful corners with her apron, rattled the tongs against the shovel, stole a glance at him, and seeing that he was in a brown study, pouted her lips, and tripped hastily away.

This brown study lasted till his dinner-time.

When he entered the coffee-room, he found himself in the presence of a gentleman of commanding presence, and fine, though somewhat stern expression of features.

This was Mr. Scarisbrick, of Witheridge. In former generations the Scarisbricks had been wont to drive to assizes in their family coaches, and to take up their quarters, with vast pomp and luxury, at the county hotel. But now the representative of the family was compelled to travel

second-class, and to eat poor meals in the public room of a third-rate hotel.

Fortescue went through his dinner with deliberation and composure, from his first mouthful of the over-boiled cod to his last dental manoeuvre with a silver toothpick. He then took up a warm position before the fire, and fell into a reverie with the air of a man who had been accustomed to a room of his own to reflect in.

This did not fail to excite the admiration of the magistrate, who had scanned him from head to foot, and had not been displeased with the result of his scrutiny.

He was, in fact, a very handsome young man, with a huge brown beard falling on his breast, well dressed, wore little jewellery, and possessed the *je ne sais quoi* which characterizes a gentleman.

This emboldened Mr. Scarisbrick to break the ice of coffee-room reserve.

‘Nice quiet inn, sir, this.’

‘Very.’

‘One does not meet here what I call “county snobs.” You probably know whom I mean.’

Fortescue thought for a moment.

‘You mean the *parvenus* who are buying out the real squireage of the country.’

‘I do, sir.’

‘It is a very hard thing,’ said the other, who

had now obtained his cue, 'that country gentlemen should find it so difficult a matter to live upon their own estates. It is, I presume, owing to the heavy taxes which are so unjustly levied upon land.'

'You are one of the few men, sir, whom I have found with sufficient common sense to realize the enormous swindle by which landholders are beggared every year; but you are one of us, sir, I suppose.'

'I have a little property, certainly.'

'May I ask what your political opinions may be?'

Fortescue hesitated.

'A Conservative, I trust,' continued the magistrate.

'Yes,' he said, quickly. 'Yes, I am a Conservative. I may indeed say that I am a Tory. I am not one of those Puseyites in politics who are mistrusted by both sides of the House—one of those who call themselves Liberal Conservatives; liberal because they make free with other people's rights—Conservative because they play close with their own. I am a Tory, sir—a Tory staunch and stern to the backbone.'

Mr. Scarisbrick shook hands with him warmly, and ordered a bottle of port. Mr. Fortescue assumed the gestures of a parliamentary orator.

'Let us be generous. We will not say that

every Whig is a blackguard, but it is very certain that every blackguard is a Whig. They have a war-cry, or cant-word—it is *Reform*. What is their idea of reform? *Change*. What kind of change do they want? *Total subversion of everything*. It is very natural that they should wish the social stew-pan to be stirred. They are the dregs, and when a mess is stirred the dregs fly to the top, which is where the dregs think they ought to be.'

'And what is your opinion of the aristocracy?'

'That we ought to worship it. There is not such another aristocracy in the world. Think of the American honourables, and spit from nausea, as they do from fashion. Think of the continental counts, who are as numerous and as dirty as the paving pebbles of a London street. An English nobleman, sir, has the breeding of a French marquis before the Revolution, the majesty of a Spanish hidalgo, the phlegm and equanimity of a German baron. He can show you a pedigree which has no beginning, for its roots are buried in the obscurity of tradition, and which will end only with the world itself. He can show you his name crowned with fresh laurels in each fresh generation; and then he can show you himself, brave and loyal as his ancestors, should his services be needed by his country or his king. Ah! my dear sir, depend upon it

those must be envious and paltry souls who can sneer at the lineal pride of such men as these.'

Thus the conversation went on for some time. The old squire became inflamed by this eloquence, which he could admire though he could not emulate, and by these sentiments which coincided so precisely with his own.

'Can I amuse myself in any way here to-morrow?' asked Fortescue, after they had exhausted politics. 'I intend resting myself a day before I continue my equestrian tour.'

'I myself have been summoned, in my quality of justice of the peace, to attend the Grand Jury during the winter assizes, which commence to-morrow.'

Mr. Fortescue bowed deferentially.

'I was not aware that I had been enjoying the society of a magistrate of the county. It is the most honourable commission that it is possible to hold in this or any other country. It is a post which is awarded to gentlemen as a tribute to their names, their position and their pedigrees. Vulgar wealth cannot buy it; mere intellectual capacity is insufficient to obtain it. It is a glorious vestige of those old feudal rights by which lords over land were lords over those upon the land.'

'If you would like to go to the assizes,' said the radiant Scarisbrick, 'I will introduce you to the

Sheriff, and you can have a seat by his side on the bench itself.'

'I should feel it the proudest moment of my life,' he said, eagerly; 'but would it not be asking too much of you?'

'Not at all, not at all; a man of your principles and opinions cannot ask too much of any one.'

'Thank you,' he answered, ringing the bell. 'I must go to bed now, though I dare say I shall not sleep a wink through thinking of to-morrow's treat. You have done me a greater favour than you can possibly understand, sir.'

'Stuff and nonsense. We breakfast together, of course?'

'Certainly; and at what time?'

'Half-past eight; I shall then be able to show you over the prison before we proceed to business.'

'I must have a glass of something warm before I go to bed,' he muttered as he took the candle from the chambermaid's hand; and leaving her in the passage, he went into the waiter's snugery, which was walled with bottles and floored with corks.

'Anything going on in Gradborough, waiter?' he said, as he sipped his brandy-and-water.

'Yes, sir, winter assizes to-morrow.'

'Oh indeed! then I think that I will go there. Tell the boots to call me at seven.'

'Is the fire burning?' he inquired, as he fol-

lowed the maid, who carried a warming-pan under her arm like a soldier's musket in the *secure* position.

She pointed to the ruby grate with a gesture of pride, and went through mysterious evolutions with her weapon of office.

And now he was undressing himself in the best bed-room of this old inn, and thinking busily all the while. The fire-flames flickered against the polished legs of the chairs, and the ebony sides of the expanding grate; yellow tongues of light danced up and down the huge bureau in the farther corner, and long dusky shadows sported on the wainscot.

One side of this queer old-fashioned chamber was as dark as the sybil's cave, one side as light as a fairy palace in midsummer moonlight.

'To-morrow,' he murmured, 'I play a dangerous game for a petty stake. I am risking my neck to redeem my honour and my word. I am a fool to hazard it, for what have *I* to do with honour? I was certainly a fool to make such a bargain, when both men were greater blockheads than myself. However, I must risk it. He has only to act decently, and we must win.'

Then he opened the carpet-bag and drew from it a small manuscript book, one page of which he read carefully several times.

* * * * *

‘Well, Harriet,’ said the waiter, ‘and how do you like No. 3?’

‘Not at all,’ she answered, with a toss of the head. ‘He hasn’t a word to say to one; and if he’s got eyes he don’t use ’em. I don’t believe he can be a good man,’ she added, in a moral tone. ‘Men of his age and looks aren’t generally so wrapped up in themselves as this one is. All he talked about was the ’sizes.’

‘What, he asked you about it too?’

‘Yes, just before dinner.’

‘It’s a very curious thing,’ said the head-waiter in a low tone, ‘but I happened to be passing by the coffee-room key-hole, and I thought I’d just look in to see if they wanted anything, you know—’

‘Oh, you quiz!’ giggled the girl. ‘You’re one of the two funny men that come over in three ships, you are.’

‘Well, what should I see but them two as thick as thieves, and what should I hear but them a settlin’ about going to ’sizes to-morrow. Then d’rectly afterwards he comes here to me, and wants to make out as if he didn’t know that anything of the sort was going to take place. One would think he wanted to squeeze dust into our eyes, Harriet.’

‘So he may, if he likes; but I’m not a-goin’ to shut mine to squeeze it out again. I’ll keep ’em open, and right upon him, too.’

‘And then his servant’s such a cure: he don’t look like any gentleman’s servant I ever saw before: and he talks—I can’t say what he talks like.’

‘He kept using such funny words,’ said Harriet, ‘that I had to ask him once or twice what he meant, and he said, people that lived in the country couldn’t understand London dictionaries; but *I’ve* lived in London, and I never heard sitch gibberish, never.’

CHAPTER XX.

GAMMONING THE TWELVE.

MESSRS. SCARISBRICK and Fortescue breakfasted together on rusty rashers of bacon, eggs boiled to bullets, and tea which dribbled out of the spout three drops at a time, as if it was ashamed of being so weak. After which they helped each other on with their greatcoats like a couple of intimate friends.

Arrived before that massive turreted pile, which the lower orders romantically titled *Gradborough Castle*, Mr. Scarisbrick despatched an envoy to the governor's house with his card, and a verbal request that they might be shown over the prison. The man returned with the head-jailer, who, with a polite bow, and a graceful rattle of his huge bunch of keys, ushered them into the interior of the establishment.

'Bah!' cried Fortescue, looking round him at the snowy corridors and polished iron galleries;

‘this is something very different from what I had expected. ’Pon my word, I’m inclined to believe that prisons, like the gentlemen who fill them, are not so black as they are painted. But—eh! what’s this?’

And he pointed to a line of men, who, clad in a strange garb, with masks on their faces, were standing motionless as statues, with their heads drooped upon their breasts.

The jailer smiled, and opening the door of an empty cell, explained its domestic arrangements. While they were reading the printed rules upon the wall, and examining the machineries of the bedstead and the washing-basin, the governor entered, and having shaken hands with Mr. Scarisbrick, was by him introduced to Fortescue.

The governor escorted them into the kitchen, and through the yard, and showed them men working on the cranks, and allowed them to glance into the mysterious recesses of the Dark Hole.

Mr. Scarisbrick looked at his watch. ‘I fear that we must go into court now,’ he said.

‘And you have not been half over the prison,’ said the governor, with an air of commiseration. ‘But I hope,’ he added, with grave deference, ‘that you have been satisfied with what I have shown you.’

‘Perfectly, sir,’ replied the old gentleman, with

a low bow. 'The prisoners appear to me to be healthy and well-treated, and their cells clean. I shall therefore have great pleasure in assuring my brother-magistrates in the Grand Jury room, that Gradborough Prison does credit to yourself and to the county. And with respect to your own comfort, Major Knox, have you anything to wish for, or complain of?'

'Nothing, sir, except that I find it more difficult to get a ticket-of-leave than my prisoners do.'

'The rules are strict with regard to your absence, because your personal influence and authority are so valued. I will, however, speak to the visiting justices upon the matter.'

The governor thanked him.

'With respect to myself,' said Fortescue, 'I assure you that I have been enchanted. I feel almost inclined to break somebody's head or windows, and spend a week with you myself.'

'I shall be delighted to see you; and if you do come I promise you this cell. Observe how admirably it is situated for light and comfort. The sun comes in at the window in the morning, and enters through the key-hole in the afternoon. You might fancy yourself in your own summer-house.'

'It is No. 5,' said Fortescue, laughing. 'I must make a note of it.'

‘Any murderers this time?’ asked Scarisbrick, to change this conversation, which appeared to him sacrilegious.

‘Yes, we have got one,’ said the governor, in the tone of a menagerie keeper; ‘and a very bad case, if it is proved against him.’

‘And will it be proved against him?’ asked Fortescue, quickly.

The major wheeled right-about-face, and looked at him.

‘Yes, unless he can find an alibi. It is only circumstantial evidence, you know.’

A court of justice is built almost everywhere in the same fashion. A throne at the upper end for the judge—benches right and left for the sheriff and justices—boxes on each side for the juries—separate pews for the jail-chaplain, the recorder, and the clerk of the court—chairs and a table of blue cloth for the barristers—the witness-box—the dock—and benches piled tier over tier for the convenience of spectators.

There is also a large stone hall outside, in which the witnesses congregate till their turn comes to be called. British witnesses seem to possess an inexhaustible supply of sandwiches in brown paper, and ardent spirits in old medicine bottles. Upon these they feed incessantly, partly to kill time, partly to fortify their moral courage, which

they know will soon be tried in public as severely as the integrity of the prisoners.

Up and down a passage which leads to the Grand Jury room and to the private entrances into the court, one may see the attorneys in their Sunday shabby genteels, and in great bustle and importance running backwards and forwards, now halting to confab with gentlemen whose anxious faces mark them as clients—now with the barristers, who wear stereotyped smiles upon their faces as if lawlife was a pleasant dream.

The judge had arrived, and had delivered his charge in a stillness that was only broken by the shouts of the ushers for silence: the tedious oath-taking preliminaries and several cases of minor interest had been gone through, when it was learnt from the prison bill which served as the programme for the morning's entertainment that the Red Hill case was about to be called on.

Then, as if by magic, the court, which had hitherto been almost empty, was in ten minutes crammed from floor to ceiling.

In one of the streets of Gradborough there is a small pastry-cook's shop; in this shop there is a small back parlour, into which those who incline to refreshments of the more substantial nature may retire; in winter to empty basons of soup,

and to toast their feet on the edge of the fender ; in summer to feast on ices, and on the fragrance of the window-ledge geraniums.

A young lady was seated in this room, and was gazing abstractedly at the fire, which blazed cheerfully in its tiny grate. She was dressed in deep mourning. Her cheeks were hollow ; her eyes were red, and for one who seemed so young the wrinkles on her forehead were strangely numerous and deep.

She started and looked towards the shop-door, which had tinkled a small bell as it opened. Then, as if disappointed, she turned her head away, sighing.

‘Have you got any soup, gal?’ said one of the people who had just entered.

‘Yes, sir ; gravy, ox-tail, and mock-turtle.’

‘Let’s have three, then ; one ox, one mocks, and a gravy. Here, Luke, this little room’s bin made for us, I be sure. No offence to you, ma’am, I hope.’

The lady bowed, and assured them that their presence would not inconvenience her.

There were three of them. A tall large-boned countryman, a short fat man, and a big coarse-looking woman with glaring bonnet, gown, and shawl.

‘That was a rum start, Giles.’

‘That it was, Silas.’

‘Wot’s that?’ said the woman. ‘Wot was the rum start, Giles?’

Oh, I forgot you wern’t in court, Sairey. It was about that murder on the Red Hill as we was a-speaking on.’

The young girl started again and flushed scarlet. Then her cheeks from red became pale, and from pale became livid.

She bent a little forward, as if listening.

‘Tell us all about it then. A want’s something to pass time while the soup’s a-brewin’.

‘It appears,’ said Silas, ‘as how this here Mr. Thomas Newell was snatched down off his horse with a blow from a cudgel, or sitch-like weapon, and that by night. Now there’d bin a strange man seed not more than an hour afore in a public nigh to the Red Hill; and he had pistols and a heavy stick with him, and had bin asking questions about this said Thomas Newell, who was kipping it up in another room, and who, mind ye, had all his whate money about him. Now it appears that this man, though he said he was a-goin’ to Saltwich, was never seed to go into Saltwich, and so pippel thort he was the man as did it. And not many weeks arter, a fine lusty farming gal as had seed and spoke to this feller in the public that same night, and as was the fust to find the poor young farmer’s body, (a massey oh! how white that young lady do look!)

seed somebody at Dulton Hiring Fair, who, though he'd white hair and a green shade on, looked 'nation-like, and talked 'nation-like, the man as she'd seed at the public, and as had been suspected of murdering this Mr. Thomas Newell.'

'Laws!'

'Well, Sairey,' continued Silas, gratified by this exclamatory proof of her attention, 'she goes at un like a bull at a gate, tears off his wig, and shade, pulls a pair of lead towels (pistols) out of his breast, and gives him into charge, all in a minit.'

'And he's the man as did it; there can't be no doubt about that.'

'Softly, gal, softly; you must bear in mind that nobody seed him do it, or heerd him do it; it was only a matter of suspisshun, and sir-come-stanstiable evidence, and that I puts no faith in, especially arter what took place to-day. Now iverybody noticed how the prisoner helt his head down all through the trial. He stood there like a blind man with his eyes upon the ground, and his hands folded in front, and sometimes a shiver running through him as if he was a-cold. And when the case was made out so far agen him he raised his head and looked towards the lord judge, and fainted clean away.'

'Well, I never!'

'When they brought him to, Sairey, they asked

him why it was he was taken so. And he said there was a genelman sitting up there who had seed him in quite a different part of England on the night that this Mr. Thomas Newell had been murdered. Well, this genelman as was sitting next to the High Sheriff, he said as he couldn't rightly remember having seed the man's face afore, but that if the prisoner could rekollect where it was, and when it was, and whether he 'tracted his 'tention in any particular way, he kipt a dairy in which he put everything down, and that perhaps he might be able to clear him that way. The prisoner thought awhile and then he said:—

“It was eight o'clock in the evening; you were standing at the door of the Cricketer's Inn in the village of Ealwell near London. I came up to you and asked you if you could give me any recommendations to the genelmen of the neighbourhood, because I wanted to set up in saddlery there, and you said that you could not. It was a drizzly evening, and there was a man in liv'ry standing by you.”

‘The genelman being swored and put into the box, said: “I certainly was in Ealwell some time before Michaelmas, my lord, and I had my servant with me. But I cannot speak exactly as to the day, and I cannot say that I remember the prisoner's face at all. However, if you will permit me to send to *The Old Carved Lion* for

the dairy which is in my luggage I shall at all events be able to swear to the date." Here's the soup.'

'Drat the soup; go on with your story.'

'The soup will get cold, won't it?'

'So will the story if you break it off in the middle. Tell the tale and eat the broth at the same time.'

'Very well,' said the obedient Silas; 'the dairy was sent for, and brought over from the inn by the genelman's own servant and a constable of the police. While they were gone for it there was a buzz and a hum round the court, like a great parcel of bees. It would have paid a man well to've come eight miles only to hear it. And the book bein' brought, the genelman stood in the witness box, like a parson in his pulpit, and read these here words, which have stuck to my head like glue:—

"Rode into Ealwell on an equestrian tour through the southern counties. Put up at the Cricketer's Inn, and never wish to be worse treated. *Drizzling like the deuce; sha'n't ride on till it stops. Exceedingly annoyed by a low fellow who came and pestered me about sailoring or saddlery, or something.*"

'The genelman then read out the date of this entry, which was hidetical with the day on which the farmer was killed, and handed the book to

his lordship, who hexamined the book very carefully, and passed it on to the jury, who did the same. Then the servant was put into the box—a great black-bearded fellow he was—and he had a better memory nor his master, for he rekelled the man's face as well as could be, and swore to it. Then, of course, Sairey, it was all plain as the day: the man was a bad man, and a thief; he seemed to own to as much as that hisself, but he no more did that murder nor my old brindled cow did.'

'They've let him go, in course?'

'Laws, ay! the jury didn't want long to lay their heads together for thart. There was one, though, in the court as wouldn't have it at any price: that was the gal as caught him—Nancy Middleton. Oh! she did becall 'em; they were obliged to give her into charge. I dessay she was mad, for when she was in the box she made the pris'ner's lawyers 'most efraid on her; she did ketch 'em up so savage when they tried any of their cross-confounding games on, and hung into 'em properly for't. But, bless us! where's the lady gone? She didn't like to hear about murders, seemily. I noticed she was looking white as ice all the while I was a-talking.'

* * * *

'Oh! William,' cried Annie, as she clasped the

arm of an athletic young man, who had just entered the shop, 'I have heard it all.'

'It was a wonderful thing, Annie, dear; it 'most reminds us of them miracles we used to read about in the great Bible at home.'

'How inscrutable are the ways of God!' murmured the poor girl, as she raised her beautiful blue eyes, shining with tears, towards heaven. 'He has saved us one pang more. If this man had been hung, some day or other the truth would have come out; and should not we be grieved, William, when we discovered that poor Tom had been the means of destroying an innocent life. It would be almost like *his* death over again.'

* * * * *

'Ay! ye may take me to prison,' cried the girl, fiercely, shaking her clenched hands till the chains rattled. 'Ay! ye may let the murderer go free; but I will kill him for all that. Mark me! I'll kill that man, if I hang for't.'

'And hang for't you certainly would, elseways go to the 'silum,' said a jailer; for never was a man better cleared, by evidence of word and evidence of writing, than has this man been to-day.'

* * * * *

'What beautiful ink you must use,' said one of the attorneys, glancing with eyes of admiration

upon the now famous manuscript. Although it has been months upon the paper, it is as black and glossy as if it had been written a few days ago.'

'I always make my own, and shall be happy to present you with the recipe; there is nothing like having good ink.'

He tore a slip of paper from his note-book, and wrote as follows:—

'Best Aleppo galls, 1 lb.; copperas, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.; gum-arabic, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.; white sugar candy, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Bruise the galls, and beat the other ingredients fine; infuse them into three quarts of white wine, or the same quantity of rain-water, according to your circumstances. Let it stand by the fire three or four days; then put it on a slow fire to boil, stir it frequently, and let it stand for five or six hours, till one quarter of it be evaporated. When cold strain it through a coarse piece of linen, then bottle, and keep it for use.'

'But be very careful,' said Fortescue, with a queer smile, 'to preserve the exact proportions of the galls and copperas, and to procure the materials from an honest chemist. If your ink *should* turn pale, you may safely attribute it to carelessness in the composition, or adulteration in the drugs.'

CHAPTER XXI.

NIGHTFALL.

It was the hour of twilight: the birds were cradling their children with songs; the leaves murmured harmonies, and the west wind kissed them as he passed.

The old Roman Well was encircled by the village girls. They had crowned it with garlands of blue-bells and wild honeysuckles, as their fathers had been wont, to do centuries before. They sang to it a hymn of praise, and danced round it gaily to the music of their song, with arms bare, and dresses kirtled to the knee.

They paused and cried, ‘ *The maid’s wreath!*
The maid’s wreath!’

A tall handsome girl glided to the brink of the well. She was pale, and though she was largely made, her arms were shrunk and wasted as if she had but lately recovered from a dangerous illness. She carried a wreath of flowers in her hand, and

loosing them one by one, she dropped them into the well, singing,

Well of the black mouth,
Sweet flowers we bring,
And sweet voices too
Thy praises shall sing.
We love thee, and give thee
What pleases thee best ;
We love them, and give them
A home in thy breast.

They gave her a gigantic sunflower : her hands trembled as she took it, and her eyes danced wildly as she sang :

Sunflower, sunflower, growing up so high,
You and I are maidens, and we must not die.

Then she gave a horrible laugh :

But no no, thou art no more a maid,
And devils are merry and angels are sad.
Poor fool ! thy lot in this world is undone,
Thou hast tasted the light and love of the sun.
Now I will wreak on thee punishment sore,
Now thou shalt see thy lover no more.
I will bury thee ever and aye from his sight,
Where his beams cannot reach thee though they be
so bright ;
Where his beams cannot reach thee, shine as they may,
Till thou languish and wither, and lastly decay.

She dropped the flower into the well, and bending over with her arms folded on her breast, laughed again, and then danced madly, her hair tossing and waving round her waist while the girls sang in chorus :

.

Thus, thus, thus, the silly maid we treat,
Who listens to a false tongue and trusts to man's deceit.
The world it hates the wanton, and hides her from its eyes,
She weeps for mercy, starves for bread, prays to God and dies.
Be wise then, be chaste then, virgins of the dell,
Or we tear out thy heart for the Spirit of the well.

Joining hands, they danced furiously round the well, uttering wild shrieks, and biting one another's hair; then the dance changed; the songs were renewed; and another girl advanced with a fresh wreath towards the dark and ominous brink.

At the same moment one of them discovered an old woman, who was crouched upon the ground between the trunks of two fallen trees.

'What be ye a-doing here?' said the girl, angrily; 'and where be ye come from if ye dunna know that *the crowning of the well* is only to be done and seen by young gells and maidens?'

'You will forgive me, I hope,' said the old woman, gently, 'but I have walked a great many miles to see this well, and I am faint and weary now.'

She rose, and walked slowly away.

The girl looked at her, and then ran after her.

'Then you be from these parts, mother?'

'Yes, my girl; time has been when I danced the maid's dance at the old Roman Well, and threw the maid's wreath down. But I was very young when I left here to go to service.'

‘ Oh !’ said the girl, stopping, as if she wished to return and complete the Druidic rites, which were performed once a year with such mystery. ‘ Well, dame, I hope I didn’t say anything to anger you. I didn’t know but what you might ha’ bin some curious gossip from Dulton or there, to come and make meescheef about nothing.’

She retained her by the sleeve.

‘ Don’t go yet : I wish to ask you something ; it is about the woman who threw her child down the well. I read it in the papers at the time, and as I once knew the mother, I should like to find out something about her.’

‘ There isn’t much to hear about it,’ said the other, impatiently, for she could hear the songs which were commencing again. ‘ Ann Whittick got away from Squire Scarisbrick’s house, where she had been locked up, and has never been heard of since.’

‘ And the child—the child ?’

‘ Squire Scarisbrick took care of the child, and sent him to Master Newell’s of Chalk Pits. When he was about thirteen years old, he ran away to Lunnon, so they said, and *he* ain’t been heard on since.’

* * * * *

On the side of a dark rolling river, half buried among willows and rushes, stood a small cottage. Suspended before the door was a large bell, the

rope of which swung backwards and forwards in the breeze. The road which passed the cottage consisted of two huge ruts, with grass growing in the space between: it ended at the river-bank. To this bank were chained two boats: the one a kind of barge, suited for the carrying of vehicles and large burdens; the other one of those small flat-bottomed boats, which may be propelled either by oar or pole, and which are called *punts*.

It was Molestoke Ferry—the most desolate of all spots which the Thames passes in its course towards the sea. The cottage was the residence of the ferryman; the bell was rung by those who wish to be ferried over to the other side.

Some years previously, the house and ferry had been put into the auction-room. An old man, whom nobody knew, had bought them, and had lived there since that day.

He was never seen outside his door, except to ply his calling as a ferryman, and once a month to go to London, where he would always remain a night, and return the next day with a face, they said, more pale and stern than before. He had no servant in the house to help him; he did all his washing and house-cleaning himself: he took his meat from the butcher, his bread from the baker, and his milk from the farmer's man at the door. He was known only by the name of the Molestoke ferryman.

His habitation was well suited to a misanthrope : it was surrounded by barren fields, exposed to cold winds ; and in the winter the river would flood his garden, and would beat against his house, the walls of which were green and mossy from damp.

The neighbours looked with astonishment upon this man, who could remain buried in solitude within sight of men ; who dwelt amongst waters ; who seemed to live in eternal cold and darkness, for no lights shone ever from his windows ; no smoke ever rose from his chimney.

When scandal stood still the gossips could always fall back upon the Molestoke ferryman. Some said that he was a sorcerer ; some that he was a criminal hiding from the eyes of the law ; others that he was only a poor madman.

It was the hour of twilight. Frogs croaked hoarsely from the dank ditches by the river-side : sometimes an owl flew past, with its white ghastly wings and hollow cry.

A woman stood before the ferryman's house. Her face was weary ; her garments were soiled. She stood there some minutes as if wavering ; then she seized the rope, and rang the bell violently.

The cottage door opened, and an old man with a lantern advanced slowly down the garden

path towards the gate. Through the bars of this gate, which was secured by a padlock, he examined her face.

‘Do you wish to cross over?’ he said.

‘No, sir, I wish to speak with you.’

‘Speak.’

‘I wish to speak with you alone.’

The old man extended his thin white hands towards the barren dusky plain and towards the silent river.

‘You may speak here safely,’ he said, with a melancholy laugh; ‘we are quite alone.’

‘Oh, sir!’ cried the woman, ‘they say that you know more than other men. Tell me where I may find my son. I have lost him.’

He shook his head.

‘Do not deny me, sir; if I do not find him I shall die. My feet are worn with walking; my eyes are sore with weeping; and my heart is pining for him it cannot find. Oh, sir, restore him to me, I entreat you!’

She fell upon the damp ground, and prayed with clasped hands to him who looked at her through the gate.

‘Such are women!’ muttered the misanthrope. ‘When their own resources have failed them, they make one shallow hope an assurance, and appeal to a poor old man as if he were a god.’

‘It is my last hope,’ she moaned.

‘What is your name?’ he asked, absently.

‘My name is Ann Whittick.’

He gave a convulsive start, and his eyes glared at her through the iron bars like those of a caged wolf, who sniffs blood in the air.

There was a pause of several moments. He slowly unlocked the gate.

‘Enter,’ he said, in a solemn voice.

She entered.

He opened the door of his house, and again bade her enter. She entered a room, which was heated by a charcoal stove, and that was why no smoke ever rose from his chimney; it was lighted by an oil-lamp suspended from the ceiling, while thick oaken shutters, and a baize edging to the foot of the door, prevented a gleam of light from penetrating abroad. The floor and walls were hidden by books. A table in the centre was covered with papers, and with instruments of a kind which she had never seen before.

He trimmed the lamp and sat down, leaning his face on his hand. He seemed to be thinking, but all the while his eyes were upon her—his eyes full of sorrow and compassion.

Thus they sat for almost an hour. This silence frightened her; so did his eyes, because they never moved, and because they were so sad.

At length he spoke.

‘Ann Whittick, the thoughtlessness of man,

and the bleeding of your own heart, drove you to a crime. You have repented. God is just. He punishes you now ; but He is also merciful. He will pardon you hereafter.'

She bent her head, and her lips moved.

'Yes,' continued that grave voice, 'pray to God to give you strength to endure the afflictions with which He will chasten you. Pray to God for strength, poor woman ; pray to God for strength.'

She shuddered. Why did he look at her so strangely ? Ah, her son !

'He is dead,' she cried, seizing his hands. 'You know that he is dead. No, he cannot be ; he is so young ; he cannot be dead.'

The ferryman rose and opened a small cabinet. Thence he took a large book bound in black, and placed it upon the table before him.

Now his face became stern : jets of fire darted from his eyes. Ann Whittick began to tremble.

'In this book,' he muttered in a hollow voice, 'are recorded the vile deeds of a woman who is not of earth, but of hell.'

The woman started to her feet.

'What is her name ?'

'Her name by birth was Jane Talbot ; by marriage Jane Williamson ; by crime—'

'Charlotte Chatfield. I know you now, sir. I know who you are, and what—'

‘Be silent!’ he cried. ‘Have you no wounds in your heart which words will open? Be silent, poor woman, and listen to your woes which are kindred to my own.’

He opened the book. She shrieked. There were pages of writing, and the letters were all red.

‘The words in this book,’ he said, ‘are written with blood and tears. Listen.’ And he turned to a page.

‘Ann Whittick, hiding from the police for the attempted murder of her child. Repentant, and desirous of gaining an honest livelihood. The daughter of Satan discovers her: she pretends friendship: weans from her the relation of her crime: threatens to hand her over to justice if she refuses to obey: destroys her.’

The woman groaned. He turned to another page.

‘George Messenger runs away from home, and sells birds’-nests in London. The Fiend finds him: takes him to her den: depraves his mind by gradual degrees: teaches him to cheat: places him under a notorious thief: sends Ann Whittick upon the streets because she, warned by the instincts of a mother’s love——’

‘Ah, it was my son!’

‘Yes,’ he replied; ‘George Messenger, placed under the care of Newell, a farmer, by Mr. Scaris-

brick, ran away to London. In different hands he would have become great. But under a dunce he became mischievous; and under a fiend——'

'Why do you not continue? There is more writing on the page. Go on, go on: I can bear it. I am very calm.'

He closed the book; she sprang towards it with a yell, but his eyes repelled her: it was not because they were stern, it was because they were so sorrowful. She crept back from him.

'Tell me this, sir: is he alive or dead?'

'He is alive.'

'Oh tell me where he is! I shall die else before I see him. Oh, give him to me! give him to me!'

A tear rolled down his cheek.

'*She* must tell you: I cannot.'

'She? Jane Williamson?'

He bent his head.

'Is she in London?'

He made the same sign. 'Now leave me,' he said.

She went from the door: he followed her to the gate. As she opened it, he laid his hand upon her shoulder, where it felt like hot steel.

And he hissed into her ear:

'*When the cup is full, come to me.*'

* * * * *

It was the hour of twilight, and in London.

The first tunes from the casino orchestras had commenced, and their floors resounded to the tread of the dancers: the doors of the theatres had opened for the second price; from the cafés, saloons, and taverns of the Haymarket and its purlieus, red lights had begun to gleam, hoarse voices to swear; and this fearful quarter, where vice and drunkenness reign undisturbed, now began to fill with the votaries of filth, and the victims of vanity—men who covered their natures of beasts with the garb of gentlemen—women who, with sad gaiety and livid smiles, walked, walked, walked, in order that they might not starve.

In a dark street near Leicester Square, two women met beneath a gas-light. Both started; one of them tried to pass: the other seized her.

‘No; I must speak to you, Charlotte Chatfield.’

The young woman affected surprise.

‘Why, is it really you, Mrs. Appleton.’

‘It is I,’ she answered, gloomily.

‘Do you want anything?’

‘I have something to say to you.’

Charlotte hesitated. ‘Perhaps I may learn something from her,’ she thought.

‘Let us go into this café,’ she said.

They entered a café, which was furnished with small marble tables and luxurious ottomans. It was divided into two compartments. They passed

into the farther one, where they could converse with privacy.

First, however, it was requisite to order something.

‘*Garçon !*’

A waiter with the shaved cheeks and small black moustache of the true Frenchman answered the call.

‘*Un verre de parfait amour.*’

He bowed, vanished, and returned with a tiny glass filled with a liqueur red as a girl’s lips, luscious and perfumed as the nectar of the gods.

‘Now, my dear Mrs. Appleton,’ she said, as she sipped the beverage and reclined in a voluptuous attitude ; ‘what have you to say to me ?’

‘I am come to ask you what you have done with my child ?’

‘Your child !’

‘The boy whom you adopted from the streets and taught to be a thief was my son. I always loved him,’ said the poor woman ; ‘I always loved him without knowing why. But he was the babe I nursed at this breast and carried in these arms, and kissed with these lips ; the babe I tried to kill when I was mad and foolish, and whom they tore from me and made me fly here for my life. I never knew it till a few months ago, and I’ve been searching for ye ever since.’

‘This is very curious and romantic. And you

really mean to say that you have not seen nor heard of our young friend since that eventful night ?’

‘Never once, never once. But what could I do ? You threatened me with the police if I tried to balk you, and I was altogether in your hands. I did not know that he was my own darling son : if I had,’ she said, fiercely, ‘the rope itself shouldn’t ha’ held me from snatching him from ye. But I didn’t know that then ; I only knew that I loved him, I didn’t know why.’

Charlotte Chatfield sipped her *parfait amour*.

‘This is really very dramatic, Mrs. Appleton, very dramatic indeed. And I suppose there will be no harm in gratifying your curiosity, especially as it may serve you as a lesson not to play at pitch-and-toss with babies for the future.’

‘Jeer at me if ye will, but tell me where he is.’

‘You have heard of Dandy Dangerfield ?’

Ann Whittick turned pale. ‘Eh !’ she murmured, ‘then my boy has fallen into his hands. All is lost ! all is lost !’

‘Dandy Dangerfield is the Bully Grand of the Forty Thieves, and the standing toast at every boozing ken between Westminster and White-chapel. While other men have been content to shine in one branch of the profession, the Dandy has made himself master of them all, and is equally notorious as a cracksman, as a drummer, as a mobsman, a shofuller, or a smasher.’

‘I know, I know,’ cried the woman, impatiently, ‘but my boy, where is my boy?’

‘His genius of calculation would have made his fortune at cards before the hells were abolished, and could he obtain an entrée into the Ottoman or the Cocoa-nut Tree, where hundreds of pounds are frequently staked upon a game, his skill at billiards would speedily enrich him.’

‘And is he not rich now?’ replied the other, stifling her rage that she might obtain the information she desired.

‘No, he is very poor. He is unsettled, and extravagant. Besides, he is an unprincipled corrupter of our own sex, and so spends more thought upon vice than upon crime. Vice is a safe game, because it is played at by the aristocracy, but it is the reverse of lucrative.’

‘And my son, you say, is with him.’

‘Every day,’ she replied laughing. ‘You might almost swear that they were the same men.’

Ann Whittick sighed.

‘In fact,’ she continued, speaking slowly and distinctly, ‘to tell you the truth, forlorn and afflicted parent, Dandy Dangerfield, with his fifty aliases and his thousand crimes, is no other than the youth whom I had the honour of initiating into his profession.’

The mother did not speak : she stared at her stupidly, as if she had not understood her : but she breathed very hard.

‘I repeat,’ said the girl, ‘that your son is now called Dandy Dangerfield, and is at this moment hotly pursued by detectives for a murder which he committed at Ealwell. When they find him he will be hanged.’

And she sipped her *parfait amour*.

‘If you say that, I will throttle you!’ shrieked the woman, glaring at her and tearing at her breast with her hands. ‘It is a lie! a lie! —a devilish lie!’

‘Now don’t be noisy, my dear Mrs. Appleton,’ she said, with a smile; ‘it is of course dramatic, but we don’t wish to bring down the house just now, we don’t indeed.’

The unhappy creature fell into a chair, and the tears streamed in hot torrents from her eyes. Suddenly she sprung to her feet.

‘I will save him yet! I will save him yet! Do you know what I will do? I will go to him and I will show him this ring and paper.’

She snatched a handkerchief from her bosom, and showed Charlotte Chatfield a golden ring, and a slip of paper, on which the ink was brown and faded as if it had been written years before.

‘And I will tell him that he is not base-born, but born in lawful wedlock, and heir to a squire’s

land. That will tempt him to turn from his evil ways, and we will go to his grandfather, and of course he will not know what my son has been and what he will never be again, but will make up some clever story, and it will be all right, it will be all right.'

She burst out laughing, the tears running down her cheeks all the while.

'Is this really true?'

'Read that,' replied Ann Whittick, handing her the paper.

[Reads form of marriage certificate.]

'And your husband, this Robert Scarisbrick, is dead?'

'He is dead.'

'And where does the present Mr. Scarisbrick live?'

'At Witheridge House, Gradbro'shire.'

'Humph! the instrument appears to be genuine.'

'When I show it to my son he will do as I wish, will he not?'

'No one would refuse to exchange constant anxiety and danger for perpetual substance and respectability.'

'You think he will come with me then?' asked Ann Whittick, for the sake of hearing such words again.

'I am sure of it.'

‘Oh, how happy I am! And the thought only came into my poor weak head just now. It was God that put it there. My boy will be a squire, and perhaps they will make him a magistrate, Charley. Only fancy his being a magistrate after—’

Her face fell. ‘If they should find him,’ she murmured. ‘He is hunted like a wild beast. He must leave the country: yes, that will be it: that will be the way to cheat them; he must leave the country for a little while.’

‘Not unless he goes to Botany Bay,’ said Charlotte Chatfield, with a smile.

Ann Whittick looked at her anxiously.

‘What are you doing with my certificate?’

‘I am folding it up to put it into my pocket. It is a very important paper, and perhaps you might lose it.’

‘Oh, no, I should not lose it,’ she said, earnestly. ‘There’s no fear of that. I’ve kept that paper and the ring my dear husband gave me ever since I was a young and wicked girl. Don’t put it in your pocket,’ she added, fretfully, ‘I shall want it, you know, to show it to my son.’

‘But I don’t mean to let you show it to your son.’

And she sipped her *parfait amour*.

‘Not let me!—why not?’

‘Because I don’t wish your son to become a

squire and a magistrate. He would be too proud to remember his old friends.'

'Oh, Charlotte! ye'll never hold him back from life, and honesty, and heaven, and drive him on to sin, and death, and hell, and maybe beyond. Oh, gal! ye have made him everything that's bad; have ye not done enough?'

'No!' she shrieked, rising to her feet. 'No, I have not done enough, for I have not had my revenge. Harkyee, woman! I knelt to that man, —I, Charlotte Chatfield, and he spurned me as if I had been a dog. I became a woman once, and I was trodden on. I then swore that I would be revenged. I would have his life—not with stabs, or with poisons, for those are deaths too quick and honourable for him who injures me. I swore that he should die on the gallows like a common thief, and that I would be there to catch his last look, to hear his last word, and to spit on the ground, to chuckle, to snap my fingers when he died. So I have led him on from crime to crime; I have made him a thief, a housebreaker, a murderer. The gallows is ready; I have only to raise my hand. But no, I am not ready yet; he could meet death now without trembling or surprise: I must wait till he has grown sick of crime: till he loves some innocent girl: till he discovers that there are things better worth living for than danger's excitement and stolen gold.'

Ann Whittick had listened to this horrible harangue at first with shudders, afterwards with an icy calmness.

She had taken a resolution. Without replying she moved towards the door.

‘Stop,’ said Chatfield, recovering her sang-froid by an incredible effort. ‘You are going to inform against me. Now as soon as I am in prison the detectives will be put on Dangerfield’s scent. I know all his hiding-places and all his plans.’

The woman’s face darkened; a lurid light gleamed from her eyes, sinister as the last sun-beam before the tempest.

‘I understand you,’ said Charlotte Chatfield, replying to the thought. ‘You suppose that by murdering me, even if you hang for it yourself, you will be able to save your son. The idea does you credit as a mother, but believe me it would only hasten that youth’s inevitable fate. There are certain papers placed in the hands of a friend of mine; on my demise he will hand them over to the Bow Street blood-hounds, who will thence learn that Dangerfield is at this present moment in Gradbro’shire, where he pretends that he is taking an equestrian tour. He is to be found for the next month in the neighbourhood of Dulton; he rides on a black horse; disguises his face with a wig and brown beard; and passes under the name of Mr. Haward Smythe.’

Ann Whittick moaned and sank back in her chair. There was no life in her eyes, but one tear which struggled feebly down her cheeks : no life in her frame but a slight quivering in her hands.

Charlotte Chatfield looked at her with a smile. Then she drew the marriage certificate from her pocket and read it over carefully.

‘ Good ! ’ she said. ‘ This will aid my revenge, and bring me something more.’

And she took the last sip of her *parfait amour*.

END OF VOL I.





